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ABSTRACT

The central issue in educational reform should be how to confront educational inequalities, but the conservative movement has tried to transform the issue from one of inequality to one of "choice." The choice being promoted by conservative forces comes at the expense of community in that it seeks to set up schools that respond to the purchasing power of individual consumers. A market-based system of schooling would destroy the few democratic grains made in public education in recent decades. Two themes dominate in the articles in this publication; one is concern for equality of educational opportunity, and the other is commitment to public education as an integral part of the democratic vision of this country. Twenty-one articles explore educational vouchers and market ideology, and eight focus on public school choice plans and charter schools. Seven articles explore the conservative agenda with regard to school choice. Lists of major organizations affiliated with the economic and religious/far right wings of the Republican party, conservative publications, and progressive groups monitoring the right wing are included, along with a lists of nine books and six organizations as resources on vouchers. (SLD)

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SCHOOLS

VOUCHERS, MARKETS, AND THE
FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

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*Selling Out Our Schools***

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SELLING OUT OUR SCHOOLS

**VOUCHERS,
MARKETS,
AND THE
FUTURE OF
PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

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3. The Conservative Agenda

Discusses school reform issues within the context of the conservative movement's political priorities.

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Why We Are Publishing *Selling Out Our Schools*

By the Editors
of *Rethinking Schools*

It's not that our society doesn't know how to teach children well, but that we do so unequally. It's not that we don't have good schools, but that they are clustered in affluent communities. It's not that we refuse to spend lots of money on children, but that it is disproportionately showered on already privileged children.

How will this country confront these inequalities? That should be the central issue in education reform.

Yet the conservative movement has tried to transform the issue from one of inequality to one of "choice." More specifically, conservatives have used the rhetoric of choice to win popular support for proposals to provide public money to private schools and to substitute the marketplace for a public system of education.

Choice is an appealing concept. But the choice being promoted by conservative forces comes at the expense of community. It seeks to set up schools that respond to the purchasing power of individual consumers, which would inevitably undermine the egalitarian and democratic functions of public education. It seeks to build islands of excellence for a few, rather than promote a quality education for all children.

Stripped of its comforting rhetoric, a market-based system of schooling would destroy the few democratic gains made in public education in recent decades, worsen the inequalities that already permeate education, and block opportunities for meaningful reform.

Two themes dominate in *Selling Out Our Schools*. One is a concern for equality of educational opportunity. The other is a

commitment to public education as an integral part of our democratic vision for this country. Vouchers and markets stand in opposition to these concerns.

The Issue Is More Than Vouchers

Selling Out Our Schools builds and expands upon our publication *False Choices: Why School Vouchers Threaten Our Children's Future*. In the five years since we first published *False Choices*, it has become clear that one cannot separate the voucher movement from the larger effort to subordinate schools and other public institutions to the marketplace. *Selling Out Our Schools* expands our emphasis beyond vouchers and is more than twice the size of our previous publication.

Selling Out Our Schools includes articles on public school reforms such as public school choice plans and charter schools. These important reforms are often pulled in opposite directions: by those using them to expand equity, and those

using them as wedges for vouchers and privatization. The issue is not so much charters or choice as it is whether any particular proposal will expand or decrease educational opportunities for those most in need of increased opportunities.

We have also included a section on how the voucher movement is essential to the broader conservative agenda. Vouchers remain a dominant issue in education in large part because they are a top priority of well-funded conservative organizations and think tanks.

As Warren Furutani argues so eloquently in his essay, the voucher debate is not merely about the merits of any particular initiative, but is part of "a mortal battle for the fundamental soul of public education in a democratic society."

It is a battle that will remain with us until this country resolves whether it is truly committed to a quality public education system for all children. ■



Credit: Loren Santow/Impact Visuals

The Hollow Promise Of School Vouchers

By Robert Lowe

For nearly 150 years public education in the United States has been recognized as a fundamental public good. That recognition is now under attack. Building on more than a decade of national power that has radically redefined the nature of public responsibility, conservatives, under the aegis of "choice," have proposed the substitution of markets for public schools. And they have made their arguments plausible to diverse constituencies.

Despite the grave inadequacies of public education today, however, throwing schools open to the marketplace will promote neither excellence nor equality for all. Rather, it will enhance the freedom of the privileged to pursue their advancement unfettered by obligation to community.

Current efforts to promote an educational marketplace through choice trace directly to the work of conservative economist Milton Friedman. Writing in the mid-1950s, Friedman proposed that every family be given a voucher of equal worth for each child attending school. Under this plan, families could choose any school that met rudimentary government oversight (which Friedman likened to the sanitary inspection of a restaurant). Parents could add their own resources to the value of a voucher, and, presumably, schools could set their own tuition level and admission requirements.¹

At the time, Friedman's proposal failed to attract widespread support. While some people excoriated public schools during the 1950s for curricular laxity that allegedly gave Russians the jump in the space race, optimism prevailed that curriculum innovation and more attention to advanced placement classes would remedy the problem. Further, for the first decade after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, optimism remained high that public schools could create equality of educa-

Despite the grave inadequacies of public education, throwing schools open to the marketplace will promote neither excellence nor equality for all.

tional opportunity. In fact, it was school desegregation that most underscored the conservative nature of Friedman's stance.

The First Choice Program

The first choice program provided white students in Virginia public funds to attend private academies in order to avoid attending public schools with Blacks.² Friedman addressed this matter in his proposal. Although he expressed his personal desire for integration, he believed that state-imposed desegregation violated parents' freedom to choose. Thus Friedman asserted the primacy of freedom over equality and finessed the lack of freedom the less-than-equal possessed.

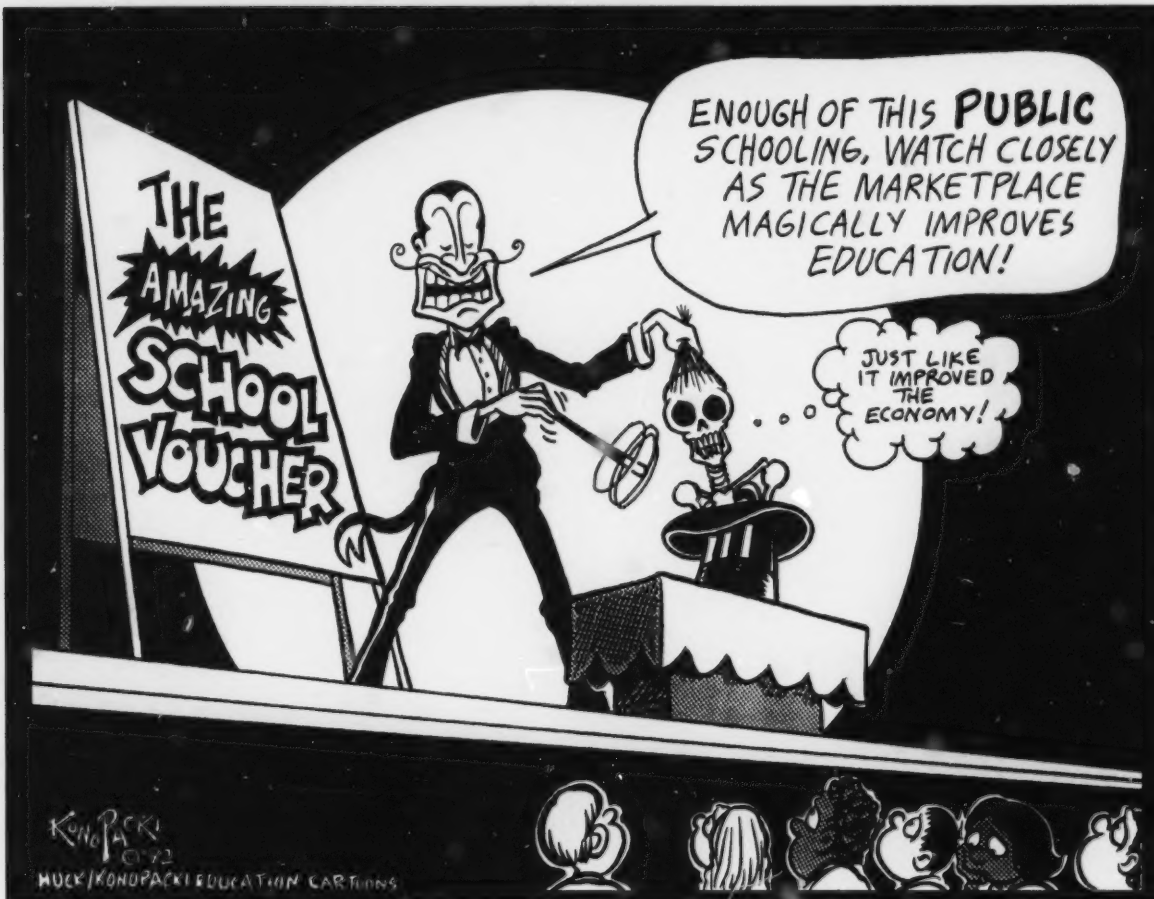
During much of the 1960s confidence prevailed that public education could promote both excellence and equity. But by the 1980s such confidence had seriously deteriorated in a political climate that identified the state as the perpetrator rather than the ameliorator of social and economic ills.³ A wave of national reports contributed to this climate by maintaining that the United States was losing its competitive edge because schools were inadequately developing students' skills.⁴ At the same time, sustained inequities in educational outcomes between white students and students of color seriously undermined faith in public schools' capacity to provide equal educational opportunity. In such an environment, a new private school choice program that emphasized opportunities for low-income students of color was linked with a new, more public relations oriented defense of the educa-

tional marketplace. This approach met considerable success in creating the illusion that choice would serve all.

The link was forged publicly in June 1990 when Wisconsin State Rep. Annette "Polly" Williams (D-Milwaukee), the African-American sponsor of the highly publicized Milwaukee Parent Choice Program, traveled to Washington, D.C., as a featured participant in the unveiling of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* by John Chubb and Terry Moe.⁵ Rarely do scholarly works become media events, but this event signified the launching of a vigorous campaign to promote educational choice. It also implied the existence of far broader support for opening schools to the marketplace than the historically conservative constituency for choice would suggest. Although it would be a mistake to conclude that support for "choice" represents a consensus among diverse political forces, it rapidly is becoming the major policy issue affecting schools in the United States today.

Neither Equity nor Excellence

At the cutting edge of this issue are the choice program in Milwaukee and Chubb and Moe's *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. The former, a modest program that provides public funds for private education, appears to demonstrate in practice that choice expands equality of opportunity. The latter attempts to theoretically justify the abandonment of all public education on the grounds that choice will produce educational excellence.



Credit: Huck Konopacki Education Cartoons

Taken together, the program and the book suggest that choice will provide both equity and excellence. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. While the Milwaukee program — a kind of affirmative action effort — may indeed provide greater opportunity for some of its participants, Chubb and Moe's brief for providing all individuals with vouchers to attend private schools fails to sustain its thesis and has dire implications for equality of educational opportunity.

The Milwaukee Parent Choice Program has received attention far out of proportion to its immediate impact. In a district that enrolls nearly 100,000 students, the program was originally intended to provide 1,000 low-income students with approximately \$2,500 each so that they might attend a non-sectarian private school. Only 558 students applied for the 1990-91 school year, and merely 341 ultimately enrolled

in the seven schools that agreed to participate. [This article is reprinted from *Rethinking Schools*, Spring 1992. While some figures regarding Milwaukee have changed slightly, the overall program remains the same. For an up-to-date summary of the Milwaukee experiment, see p. 30.]

Despite the program's small scale, nationally prominent conservatives vocally endorsed it. Even before the school term began, it won praise from the Bush administration, the *Wall Street Journal*, Wisconsin's Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, and the head of the powerful Bradley Foundation. And despite the questionable success of the program thus far, many advocates persist in seeing it as a first step in restoring the nation's educational health. They believe this only can be accomplished by breaking up the public school monopoly.

The program also has spawned vocal opposition. Some antagonists, like former Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction Herbert Grover, view Polly Williams as the unwitting accomplice of right-wing business interests bent on destroying a public good.⁶ Others oppose the program because they fear that it presages an end to a variety of perceived goods, including desegregation, teachers' unions, a common curriculum, and provisions for children with special needs.

Thus, both proponents and opponents rightly see the Williams initiative as an entering wedge in a national battle over the future shape of education in the United States. It is important, however, to see the Milwaukee Choice Program on its own terms. That many conservatives support the plan does not make Polly Williams their agent. Rather, she has responded

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Vouchers: A Battle for The Soul of Public Education

By Warren Furutani

When we talk about choice in California, we are talking about a mortal battle for the fundamental soul of public education in a democratic society. That is what the fight is about.

It is no coincidence that funding for public education is receding as our school districts become more populated by children of color. It is no coincidence that even more dollars may be pulled from our underfunded, overburdened school system by conservatives who are pushing vouchers and choice as an alternative for the middle class in education.

A Vehicle for Flight

It is clear that vouchers and choice will be a vehicle for those who have the mobility and the additional dollars to go to the private sector — while at the same time guaranteeing that those who can't will

It is no coincidence that funding for public education is receding as our school districts become more populated by children of color.

then be relegated to an even more underfunded, overburdened system. This will make it a system that has been abandoned by the middle class, forsaken by those who think they are getting better for their own but who in fact are deserting one of the most fundamental democratic institutions in our country, which is public education.

As administrators and school boards in urban districts become, like their students, increasingly people of color — and as people of color become more of a force in our urban centers — we find that those who sit in seats of state and federal power are trying

to pull away the middle class from public education. As a result, those who are left behind, those with special needs, special challenges, different languages, those whom we've been already failing for generations, will be relegated to the back seat of society for the rest of their lives.

We cannot accept that. ■

Warren Furutani is a past member (and president) of the Los Angeles City Board of Education. The above is adapted from a speech before the National Education Association Conference on Women and Minorities in June 1992.



Credit: Rick Reinhard/Impact Visuals

The Debate Is About Privatization, Not 'Choice'

An interview with Deborah Meier

You have been associated with the concept of school choice. How does your view of choice differ from that of conservatives?

There are two unrelated perspectives, and they both use the word choice. When many conservatives talk about choice, they mean that private enterprise and the marketplace are better and that public institutions are, by their nature, inferior.

We need to dismiss the idea that the concept of choice has anything to do with such proposals. They are not about choice at all. They are about privatization and a means to get rid of public education.

If we don't watch out, the word choice will mean only what conservatives want it to mean.

What do you mean by school choice?

When I've argued for choice, it has had nothing to do with abandoning public education. It has been a way to argue against the factory model of education. It has been a way to create more diverse and coherent educational communities. It has been a strategy for invention and innovation.

There are many places in this country where choice means giving families wider choices among public schools. The only thing it doesn't do is give them money in order to go to private schools.

Here in District 4 in East Harlem, we have used choice to create more and varied public schools during the last 20 years or so. We now have 52 elementary and junior high schools which replaced 20 former schools. And we offer parents in the district the chance to go to any of these 52 schools.

The largest school has 300 students and the smallest has 50. Some have different styles or focuses. In some, they have more music, or a lot more science. In some it's just a difference in how they organize the



Credit: Alain McLaughlin/Impact Visuals

school day.

In Manhattan, virtually every district is moving in this direction — taking the same buildings and dividing them into smaller, more cohesive schools where people are there by choice. Part of what motivates these plans is the unfortunately new understanding that small schools are better. It is an enormously sad and almost criminal fact of American schools that we got enamored of large schools.

At the same time, choice does not solve the problem of equity. We have had problems of inequity in all sorts of schools. People who are not concerned with equity will use choice inequitably.

Why should we have a public education system in this country? What are the advantages?

The concept of public education rests on an assumption that the way we educate our youth is connected to the collective future we hope for. There isn't a more important decision in a democracy than the kind of education we want for all our children. If, for example, we believe that children have a better future if they meet

kids from different backgrounds, then a certain policy follows from that belief.

The presumed advantage of the marketplace is that you don't think about anyone else when you make decisions. Under a marketplace approach to schools, the only people who have a voice are parents. The idea is that somehow through parents making the individual decision of what's best for their child, we will get what is best for society.

The immediate impact of private choice plans is to undercut financing for those least likely to be served well, if at all, by the marketplace. In the process privatization also undermines the public will to finance schooling in public ways. In the long run it will undercut the needs of the larger society by substituting collective decision-making — open and public debate — with private, individual decision-making. I'm taking it for granted that America wants to maintain a democracy. ■

Deborah Meier is founder of Central Park East in District 4 in New York City. District 4 has a long-standing public school choice plan.

The Danger of Market Rhetoric

By Jeffrey Henig

The word "choice" is a potent political symbol. Its connotations of personal freedom and abundant opportunities make it a slogan that is easy to rally around. It is no coincidence that choice is a central issue outside the education arena, most notably in the abortion debate. And, given the combination of potent appeal and fundamental ambiguity, it is not surprising that choice is a label simultaneously pursued by the political right and the political left.

Overhearing one woman say to another, "I'm pro-choice," tells you little about her political agenda without further clues. She may be a liberal feminist thinking about a woman's right to choose whether to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term, or a conservative mother hoping for legislation that would make it easier for her to transfer her children to parochial school.

In the thin, pure air of abstraction, educational choice can be presented as a universal goal, opposed only by those so mean-spirited and daring as to claim allegiance to repression, suppression, and force. But this illusion fades when theory is translated into specific programs.

There are many visions of school choice, and the distinctions among them are significant. They are linked, however, in this regard: each and every proposal to expand school choice has the potential to impinge on the free exercise of choice by some groups as the price exacted for increasing the options for others. Embracing educational choice, then, does not lift us out of the messy political world in which interest is pitted against interest, and within which one group's victory usually rests on another's defeat.

The greatest risks associated with the movement for educational choice come not from choice itself, however, but from its overly close association with the market metaphor.

The central premise of economic theories of market behavior is that the provision of schooling can be understood in the same way as the provision of other goods

and services, like a used car or a good haircut. A market-place perspective reasons that if parents are freed to act as rational education consumers — able to take their business elsewhere if unsatisfied with the product that their local school provides — schools will be forced to increase the quality of education and efficiency with which they deliver it, or else risk going out of business. The problem with schools, from this perspective, is traceable to government's intrusion and its mandates, regulations and rules.

There are at least two important sticking points, however, that keep translation of the market metaphor to schools from being wholeheartedly accepted. The first has to do with many people's experiences with market forces in their everyday lives. For most of us, a trip to a shopping center is as likely to confirm fears about shoddy merchandise and inflated prices as it is to be a reassuring demonstration of the self-regulation of market forces. Where market forces and consumer choice have been introduced in education, moreover, they frequently have been associated in Americans' experience with inequalities rooted in economic advantage and racial discrimination.

The second sticking point is a bit more abstract. For there are important ways in which education is not like haircuts or cars.

Conventional economic theory allows for the existence of some goods and some conditions to which market forces do not readily apply. Education is one such condition. The emergence of a vast public-school network in the United States is based on the presumption that schooling is a "public good" that requires a direct government role, just as government is necessary to provide for the national de-

fense.

When parents make certain that their children are well educated, the benefits of their efforts are shared by the broader community (in the form of a better-trained work force, a source of civic leadership and entrepreneurial innovation, reduced demand for social welfare, lower crime, and so forth). These positive "spillovers" presumably do not play a role in a family's calculation of how much of an investment to make in its children's education. This suggests that, left to their own devices, some families acting rationally will tend to underinvest in education, relative to what is good for the society as a whole. Purely market processes, in such cases, will produce a sub-optimal level of support for schools.

Even when they recognize the collective social benefit that comes from a well-educated population, moreover, all citizens have a self interest in reducing their own contribution to funding the schools, while shifting the burden to others. Citizens who act like rational, self-interested consumers will figure that they can enjoy the benefits of living in a highly educated society even if they do not pay their own fair share. In cases like this, economists generally agree that government must become involved. Through its taxing authority, government can demand contributions from citizens, essentially forcing them to do what is in their collective best interest.

Differences in the Choice Movement

Much of the rationale for school choice rests on a market metaphor. Yet it is essential to understand that many people attracted to expanded school choice have been drawn by non-market forces such as individuality and personal growth, cul-

tural diversity, community empowerment, and the opportunity to shake up lethargic public bureaucracies. Such differences among the diverse interests in the choice movement are often obscured during the period of debate and policy formulation. But failure to come to grips with the latent cleavages in values within the choice movement invites four distinct risks.

The first risk is that public desires will be misinterpreted. A careful consideration of public-opinion polls, for example, confirms that Americans' support for the abstract concept of "choice" does not translate directly into a mandate for markets over government. Americans' view about the limits and potential for government intervention are fluid and uncertain. Nearly two out of three Americans, in 1991, indicated they favored public school choice. Asked whether they supported a voucher system that would include public, private, and parochial schools, 50% indicated they were in favor, versus 39% who were opposed. At the same time, however, respondents indicated support for a range of other policy responses that

would call for a *more* activist government. And expressions of support for vouchers proved to be highly dependent on the wording of the question.

A second problem is that the different rationales for choice — while they may seem minor at the pre-implementation stage — may be likely to clash once implementation begins. Maximizing personal freedom and development, for example, can erode the ties that bind traditional communities. Ethnic and religious groups that favor choice because they see it as a way to sustain schools promoting their way of life may want to limit students' own freedom to explore; the only choice programs they will support may be the ones that vest the right to choose in the parents. Building community power may conflict with free-market principles; parents in poor inner-city communities who see choice as a way to build more locally oriented institutions may demand public protection and subsidization of such institutions if they prove economically fragile. Those whose attraction to choice is contingent on its presumed link to orga-

nizational forms promoting more orderly environments and high academic demands may show little patience for choice if it supports alternative schools based on experiential learning, open classrooms, and countercultural ideals.

Blurring distinctions among the rationales for choice may simply delay conflict. Moreover, groups that play an influential role in pushing a policy onto the public agenda may find that they lose the ability to monitor and shape the policy once it is put into effect. Those who join the school-choice coalition as fellow travelers, rather than as converts to market theories, cannot necessarily count on being able to assert their own visions later on.

A third problem is this paradox: that in the name of greater choice, people may actually restrict choice. The rhetoric of educational choice emphasizes individual liberty, breaking down the walls that constrain us. One person's liberty, however, can be another person's corral. When we move from abstraction to policy, it becomes apparent that almost every work-

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Credit: Kirk

able plan entails, first of all, a *redistribution* of choice.

The redistribution may be from one family to another. Such is the case, for example, when my neighbor's choice to throw noisy parties conflicts with my choice to read quietly in my own backyard. Or the redistribution may be from one group to another. Regulations in my community, for example, limit on-the-street parking for cars without resident stickers; this opens up choice to me and my neighbors by restricting those of commuters, who would like to park here and walk to the train station nearby. Choice, also, can be redistributed from one broad level of society to another, as when individuals acquire increased discretion (for example, to avoid exposure to others whose values and traditions seem different) only as the broader collectivities to which they belong acquire less (for example, to sustain public institutions where people from different backgrounds learn to interact on relatively equal terms.)

Winners and Losers

Our experience with educational choice to date confirms that the label "choice" does not ensure that an initiative will not impose substantial constraints. Converting a school to a magnet school, for example, increases the choices for students outside the immediate neighborhood; to



Credit: Susan Lima Ruggles

ensure that there is room for these transfer students, however, school districts often must bar children who live in the immediate neighborhood.

The winners and losers are not preordained. Lower-income groups currently locked in ghetto public schools would benefit under some conceivable choice schemes. Under others, the principal beneficiaries would be middle- and upper-

income families given the freedom to redirect personal funds now dedicated to private school tuition. Given economic and educational disparities, both among families and across school districts, there is a serious risk that choice-in-practice will expand the opportunities of those already advantaged, at the ultimate cost of limiting opportunities for those in greatest need. Market theory systematically distracts attention from such trade-offs. It accepts the notion — as an article of faith or as a consequence of definition — that giving individual consumers the freedom to shop around determines the aggregate level of societal choice. And it is fundamentally indifferent to existing inequalities in market power and the ways they shape people's actual ability to choose.

Markets and Schools

By Peter Cookson, Jr.

The public school system as we have known it is being transformed because the structure of American society and economy has been transformed and requires a system of public education system that is more flexible, more innovative, and more just. As I see it, two competing metaphors will shape the public education system of the future. The first is that of democracy. At the heart of the democratic relationship is the implicit or explicit covenant: important human interactions are essentially communal. Dem-

ocratic metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of citizenship as a way of life. The second metaphor is that of the market. At the heart of the market relationship is the implicit or explicit contract: human interactions are essentially exchanges. Market metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of consumerism as a way of life. ■

Peter Cookson, Jr., is associate provost at Adelphi University. The above is excerpted from his book School Choice, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Undermining Collective Values

Least recognized, but ultimately most important, is the fourth risk: that the market rationale associated with educational-choice proposals will undermine the social and political institutions that are prerequisites to achieving genuine reform. Granting individuals greater choice to pursue their interests does not automatically establish a course toward social betterment, through the benign

mechanism of an invisible hand. Unconstrained by moderating values, school choice can erode collective ideals. Witness the historical reliance on freedom of choice as a means of evading racial integration. Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision prohibiting racially separate schools, some southern states used voucher, tuition tax credit, and "freedom-of-choice" schemes to maintain segregated schools. Where school choice has appeared most successful — as in some of the many experiments with magnets, magnetized districts, and statewide open enrollment — it has been at the instigation and under the direction of strong and affirmative government action.

At least as conventionally articulated, market theory questions the basic meaning of collective values and challenges the legitimacy and utility of government action beyond a minimalist menu of necessary functions. To put into place a system of educational choice that does not exacerbate fragmentation and inequality is possible, but not easy. Advocates of market models for education rely on several forms of intellectual sleight of hand to hide this difficulty. They imply that racial bigotry is largely a thing of the past. They presume the willingness of suburban residents to accept and even help to fund lower-income, minority students who might exercise their choice to leave the inner city to attend their schools. They rely on government, as a *deus ex machina*, to monitor the implementation of educational choice and to intervene authoritatively when circumstances demand. Yet they deny the corrosive effect that market premises might have on the social goodwill and governmental power that they assume at the start.

The problem is not choice *per se*. Properly conceived and properly implemented, the introduction of elements of parental choice can refresh and revitalize public-school districts that too often seem stodgy and tired. The danger comes, rather, from the ideological rationale on which market-based conceptions of educational choice are based.

Many of the individuals and groups that favor educational choice are attracted by values that have little to do with market

theory; indeed, under many foreseeable conditions, free-market forces are as likely as not to clash with personal development, communal values, community empowerment, and the maintenance of an ad hoc coalition for effective schools. But the logical coherence, academic legitimacy, and conservative appeal of conventional economic theory results in the market rationale dominating the choice movement in public, even if nonmarket rationales account for most of the enthu-

ing. The real danger in the market-based proposals for choice is not that they might allow some students to attend privately run schools at public expense, but that they will erode the public forums in which decisions with societal consequences can democratically be resolved.

Recasting the issue this way has important consequences for educational policy. First, it opens the door for advocates of public-school choice to endorse school-choice arrangements that include private

The market rationale associated with educational choice proposals will undermine the social and political institutions that are prerequisites to achieving genuine reform.

siasm and support.

Individual choice is a spirited and mischievous puppy. Treated respectfully, regarded cautiously, and disciplined appropriately, it can be a delight. Give it free rein and leave it untended, and you will wake in the morning to find your sofa cushions in shreds.

The Meaning of 'Public'

The distinction between public and private institutions is ostensibly at the center of the contemporary debate over school choice. While disagreeing on vouchers, former President Bush and President Clinton alike both accepted a common frame for the debate. "Private" school choice meant including private schools; "public" school choice meant not doing so.

While the debate over choice is properly framed in terms of public versus private choice, it is mistaken when it treats that distinction as if it relates simply to the question of whether privately operated schools ought to be included. Rather than simply focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of private versus public institutions and processes as *service delivery mechanisms*, we need to focus on the differences between private and public institutions and processes as *vehicles for deliberation, debate, and decision mak-*

schools on a selective, pragmatic, and contingent basis. Second, it reminds us that making public-school choice work requires more than simply barring the door against the inclusion of private schools. Plans limited to public schools can reflect either the positive or the negative aspects of market forces. When bounded by publicly defined goals and implemented authoritatively and effectively by public officials, school-choice plans have the potential to be stimulating and liberating. But when such plans are enacted hastily, when important values are neglected in the public debate, when critical choices about financing and regulation and scope are made without reflection or by default, and when the public officials lack the capacity to intervene affirmatively to ensure that public goals are kept in the forefront, the result may be greater inequality, greater disillusionment with public institutions, and greater fragmentation along racial, ethnic, class, and cultural lines. ■

Jeffrey Henig is a professor of political science and director of the Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University. This article is adapted from Rethinking School Choice, The Limits of the Market Metaphor (Princeton University Press, 1994).

Vouchers Are A Smokescreen

**An interview with
Linda Darling-Hammond**

Some people argue that vouchers increase educational equity because they allow low-income children, especially children of color, to go to private schools. Do you think vouchers promote equity?

This issue is particularly poignant because those who are proposing private school choice are frequently the same people who have been opposing equal funding to schools for the last 20 years.

The real equity issue is that there are radically unequal allocations of funds to schools. These unequal allocations routinely disadvantage schools in central cities and in poor rural areas. Private school choice, as it is currently being proposed, is a smokescreen to avoid tackling this real equity issue.

If you allow people to "choose" schools, there are a number of limited slots in the well-funded, well-functioning schools worth choosing. So all you are doing is making a tiny adjustment in the allocation of educational opportunity for a very small number of children and still condemning a large number of children to poorly funded, inadequate schools.

While I am always in favor of something that helps any kid on the margin, choice is an inadequate answer to the much bigger problem of our crumbling educational infrastructure.

I want infrastructure change, and I want it for central cities because they have been on the short end of the stick forever. That's first and foremost.

What do you mean by infrastructural change?

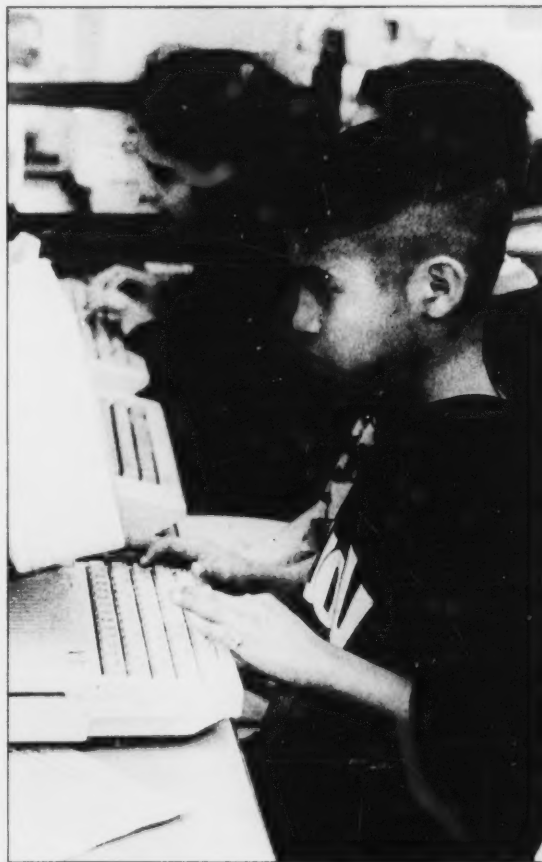
I mean changes such as equal and adequate allocation of dollars. I mean access to resources such as libraries, materials, and computers. I mean policies for recruiting teachers, for preparing them, for ensuring that there be enough well-qualified teachers in all subject areas. I mean

policies that encourage good teaching and learning — many regulations, particularly in curriculum and testing, work against good education and discourage higher level thinking by requiring a fragmented, dumbed-down curriculum governed by multiple choice tests.

We have other fundamental problems. We pay teachers 25% less than college-educated workers in other occupations. We put lots of money into chains of bureaucracy and far fewer dollars actually get to the classroom than in other countries.

Of all the infrastructure problems, the single largest is the inadequate supply of good teachers. The single most damaging aspect of education in many central city schools is the radical inexperience and lack of expertise of many of the teachers. We routinely put the teachers with the least experience and training in the most troubled central city schools.

We need federal policies that support teacher preparation and training. We don't have enough qualified teachers in math and science, for example, and nobody acknowledges this. The shortage is such that one-third of American schools do not offer physics courses. They can't. They do not have the qualified teachers. And over one-third the mathematics and science teachers are not qualified to teach what they are teaching. We hire whomever we can, or we ask teachers to teach out of



Credit: Susan Lina Rugjes

their field. For instance, when there was a glut of physical education and home economics teachers, many were moved to teach biology and math.

We have had this chronic shortage for almost 40 years. We have done little in recent years to solve it. In fact, President Reagan got rid of some of the scholarship and loan programs, along with the Urban Teachers Corps, which were designed to address this problem. The disappearance of these programs has also contributed to a growing shortage of teachers of color, who are often most committed to working in central city schools and who are needed in all schools as valuable role models.

Until we deal with these infrastructure problems, we are never going to be able to educate children well. ■

Linda Darling-Hammond is a professor of education at Teacher's College, Columbia University and co-director of the National Center for Restructuring Education.

The Market Is Not the Answer

An interview with
Jonathan Kozol

The very word "public" has a negative connotation these days. How does one counter that negative image in a way that one can defend public schools but not defend the status quo?

We've got to be blunt about the problems in a public system and be harsh critics of those problems. We don't want to be in the position of knee-jerk defenders of the public schools against the bad guys.

But we have to be careful not to succumb to this nonsense that a public system is inherently flawed and that therefore we have to turn to the market place for solutions. I've never in my entire life seen any evidence that the competitive free market, unrestricted, without a strong counterpoise within the public sector, will ever dispense decent medical care, sanitation, transportation, or education to the people. It's as simple as that.

I think it's time for us to begin to look back at some of our roots as Americans. It's absolutely crucial to claim the high moral ground on this issue and make it clear that the right-wing voucher advocates are subverting a strong American tradition. In this respect, we are the defenders of American history.

Let me state it differently. The complaints about the apparent malfunction of the public system are linked, in my belief, to the peculiar problems of impoverished, often virtually colonized, urban school systems. I mean "colonized" in the sense that very little power actually exists within the system, least of all the most important power which is finance, for which they're dependent on outside forces. And those outside forces are the people who set tax rates, the state government,

We've got to be blunt about the problems in public schools and be harsh critics. But we can't succumb to the nonsense that a public system is inherently flawed and so we have to turn to the marketplace.

the federal government, and the people who shape economic policy in America. I don't think the problems in urban public schools are inherently those of public education. I see hundreds of fine suburban school systems all around the country where nobody ever raises any question about the dangers of monopoly, because these are well-funded, reasonably attractive school systems.

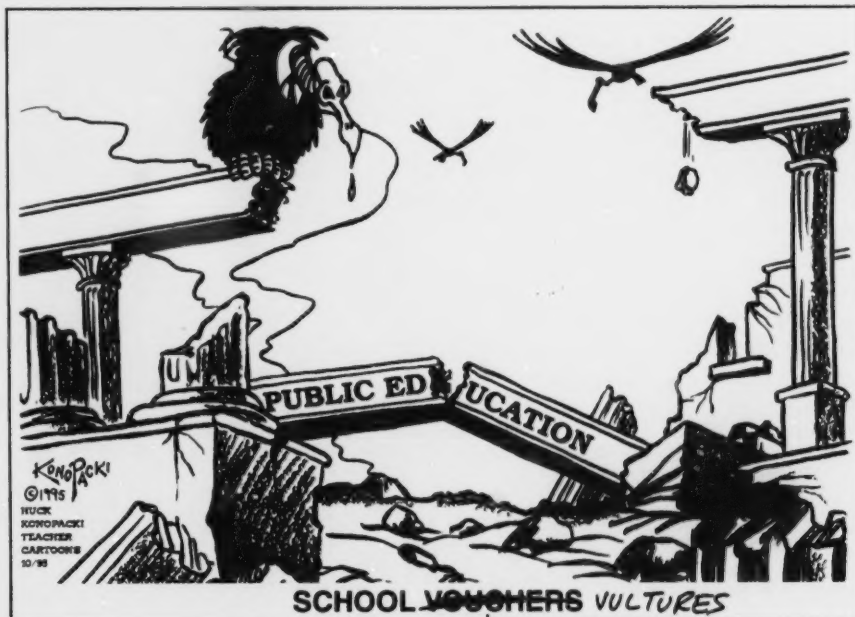
Monopoly Not the Problem

I think it's important to recognize that this issue of monopoly never came up until people realized the incredible problems of our segregated, impoverished, colonized inner city systems, and needed to find a scapegoat other than segregation and colonization. The issue to me is not

that these are public institutions. The issue is that these city schools are basically powerless. The superintendent is usually the viceroy representing other interests to which the superintendent has to be deferential, usually at great emotional cost.

My own faith leads me to defend the genuinely ethical purposes of public education as a terrific American tradition, and to point to what it's done at its best — not simply for the very rich, but for the average American citizen. We need to place the voucher advocates, the enemies of public schools, where they belong: in the position of those who are subverting something decent in America. ■

Jonathan Kozol is the author of Savage Inequalities, Amazing Grace and other books on children.



Credit: Huck Konopacki Teacher Cartoons

Questions and Answers About School Choice

**By the Editors
of *Rethinking Schools***

When people talk about school "choice" what do they mean?

People generally are talking about voucher plans that would allow tax dollars to be used for tuition at private schools, including religious schools. School choice is also used sometimes to refer to proposals that let students attend public schools in other districts, or that allow students to choose various public schools within a district.

Are there many voucher schools in the United States?

The only operating voucher program is a small, experimental initiative in Milwaukee for low-income children attending some of the private schools in the city. The program currently involves about 1,100 children attending non-sectarian schools. The legislature voted in 1995 to expand the program to religious schools, but the expansion has been put on hold until the courts decide whether it violates the constitutional separation of church and state. The Ohio legislature has passed a similar program for low-income students in Cleveland, but that is also being challenged in the courts. (See page 30 for more on the Milwaukee program.)

There have been three efforts to institute statewide voucher programs, in Oregon, California, and Colorado. All three efforts were put to the voters and defeated by a margin of roughly 2-1.

Historically, voucher plans were instituted in some southern states in an effort to circumvent the *Brown* decision. These plans were declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Instituting voucher programs nonetheless remains a key priority of the conservative movement. During the 1996 presidential primaries, for example, all the Republican hopefuls called for publicly funded vouchers for private schools.

Freedom is more than an individual concern. It also involves safeguarding the democratic freedoms of society as a whole. It's impossible to think about public education without understanding its relationship to this country's democratic vision.

Vouchers would give parents the freedom to send their children to a private school. What's wrong with that?

Parents and students must have choices. Few would disagree with that. But limiting one's concern to the rights of individual parents fails to do justice to the complexities of public education in a democratic society.

Freedom is more than an individual concern. It also involves safeguarding the democratic freedoms of society as a whole.

It's impossible to think about public education without understanding its relationship to democracy. Schools are the place in this society where children from a variety of backgrounds come together and, at least in theory, learn to talk, play, and work together. Schools are by no means equal and play a significant role in maintaining our highly stratified society. At the same time, there is no comparable arena in this country where there is a vision of equality — no matter how much this vision may be tarnished in practice — and where people of different backgrounds interact on a daily basis. Certainly it doesn't happen in our highly segregated neighborhoods. Nor does it happen in the workplace, where there's no pretense that people come together as equals. Nor does it happen in our churches.

It was clear to early thinkers like Thomas Jefferson that education was a public responsibility that was essential to creating and sustaining a democracy. Despite his narrow definition of citizenship, Jef-

erson nonetheless understood that in a truly democratic society, citizens have to be trained to rule. He understood that schools were integral not only to preparing children to be full participants in society but to be full participants in this country's tenuous experiment in democracy. We seem to have lost that vision.

But don't parents have a right to choose a school that they feel coincides with their value system, even if it's a private school?

Parents have the right to choose any school they want — but they don't have the right to expect that the taxpayer will pay for that school. Further, it's not simply a matter of parents choosing a private school but of private schools choosing students. And the school's choice always wins. If a private school doesn't want your child, whether for academic, disciplinary, religious, or financial reasons, there's nothing you can do.

The more important issue is that parents — and taxpayers — have not only the right but the responsibility to become involved in the public schools. And this needs to take place in the broader context of fighting for a better education for all kids.

The possibility for democratic discussion of what is best for all our children would virtually disappear under a voucher system.

Many religious schools have a strong track record on educating kids. What is



Credit: Kirk

SCHOOL CHOICE

so bad about opening up the voucher program to religious schools?

The core issue is that individuals would be paying tax money to support schools with religious values that might be antagonistic to their own religious values. Religion is a profoundly private matter and should remain that way.

Wouldn't vouchers allow lower-income families to send their kids to private schools and get a better education. Isn't it a move toward more equality?

In the long run, abandoning public education will only increase inequalities in education. Some low-income families might benefit from voucher plans, but most poor people would still go to public schools — and these schools would have fewer resources because taxpayers' money would be going into private schools.

If policymakers who promote vouchers really want to further equity, they should consider vouchers in the range of \$10,300 — the median tuition at private high schools in the National Association of Independent Schools. And they would force private schools to accept all students who

apply, based on a lottery system. But there's no "choice" plan anywhere in the country that offers adequate money or safeguards against discrimination.

Furthermore, there's no data to support claims that private schools are automatically better than public schools. In particular, there is little data on private elementary schools. Unlike public schools, private schools are under no requirement to release information on test scores, expulsions, drop-outs, attendance, and so forth.

Because public schools are a monopoly, they don't have to worry about competition. Wouldn't vouchers force public schools to be more innovative?

Voucher supporters often shout the accusation "monopoly" but ignore the highly decentralized nature of American education. There are over 15,000 school districts in this country, and they vary significantly in demographics, tax bases, governance, and curriculum. Most education decisions are made at the district level. Unlike in other industrialized countries, the federal government in the Unit-

ed States plays a modest role in education.

Certainly, competition can spark creativity, and in good public schools teachers compete amicably to better serve students. But competition can also create social disasters — just look at the effects of corporate downsizing.

It's also important to remember that competition in business depends heavily on advertising and cutting costs. Do we really want our schools to follow the lead of business and cut costs to the bone, perhaps by getting rid of "extras" such as libraries or music and art rooms? Or mimic corporate advertising, by spending precious dollars on public relations efforts?

Bureaucracy acts like a sledgehammer and beats the life out of schools. Wouldn't vouchers help break this bureaucracy?

We must reduce bureaucracy in our schools, and developments toward decentralized control of schools are healthy steps in that direction.

But we can't make bureaucracy into a scapegoat for all our problems. There are good schools within large, bureaucratic

continued on page 16

school systems, and there are bad private schools that are free of bureaucratic oversight. In some cases, bureaucratic regulations are hard-won protections helping to guarantee equity around bilingual education, affirmative action, and education for the physically challenged. It would be a step backward if such regulations were thrown out or ignored.

Unions are some of the strongest opponents of private school vouchers because they fear losing their power and membership. Isn't the union position self-serving?

Unions have the right to oppose attempts to turn services over to non-union workers. Given the attacks on unions in recent years, both by the government and by businesses, teacher unions have legitimate fears.

Undoubtedly, some union officials and teachers have lost sight of what is in the best interests of children. But many teachers honestly question whether the marketplace will magically lead to quality. They work passionately to improve schools and worry what will happen when the seats are filled up in the private schools and there are still millions of children left to attend a public school system depleted of resources.

Why has the idea of vouchers become so popular?

First, there is legitimate dissatisfaction with the failures of the public schools. In urban areas, in particular, far too many schools are failing our children.

Second, there has been a conservative counterrevolution against public services generally. The solution to society's problems is posed in terms of the marketplace, and privatization plans are cropping up all over. On an individual level, this counter-revolution has encouraged people to look out for themselves with little regard for others.

Third, we have to consider

whether there is a relationship between the willingness to abandon urban schools and the fact that the leadership and student population of urban schools are increasingly people of color.

Fourth, it's important to look at how businesses and wealthier individuals can directly profit from privatizing education. Since most voucher plans pay far less than the per pupil cost of schools, taxes might decrease in some districts. At the same time, middle-class parents who are already sending their children to private schools will get government aid to help pay the tuition. Finally, some businesses hope to make money by setting up private schools or getting contracts for different educational services.

What about choice plans limited to public schools?

At its best, public school choice can promote the development of intellectual

communities based on shared visions such as schools that emphasize a Montessori or whole language teaching philosophy. But if protections aren't built in, public school choice has some of the same problems as private school choice.

In practice, many public school choice plans do not provide equal opportunities to all parents. Some of the problems, particularly with interdistrict plans, include inadequate information about school programs, lack of free transportation, and reliance on individual initiative. As a result, well-informed, middle-class, and rich parents are often most able to take advantage of public school choice.

If you're opposed to private school "choice," what's your alternative vision for improving the schools?

There's no one simple answer, but one can outline the elements of meaningful reform. We must reorganize our schools so parents and teachers have more say. We must overhaul our curriculum to promote critical thinking and a multicultural perspective. We must demand racial and gender equity. We must eliminate tracking. We must change our testing and assessment so we assess thinking and learning, not just how well one answers multiple choice questions out of context. We must improve the quality of teacher training and have smaller class sizes. On a state level we should equalize funding for school districts. On a federal level, we need to substantially increase our funding for education.

There never has been, nor ever will be, a system where everyone is able to choose a school that perfectly fits their needs. The only viable solution is to improve the entire system of public education so that parents aren't forced to compete for a few select schools. ■



Credit: Rick Reinhard

School Reform: Will Markets Or Democracy Prevail?

By Alex Molnar

Market-oriented school reforms are similar to the current crop of so-called welfare reforms. The fight is not fundamentally about the absolute amount of money spent. Rather, it is a struggle over the relative division of wealth in our society. Neoconservatives who favor market-oriented education reforms reject the idea that the wealth of the United States will have to be apportioned much more equitably if poor and working-class children are to attend schools that are not falling down around them, as well as to have decent homes, adequate clothing, proper nutrition, and health care.

The evidence, unlike the power, is not on the neoconservative side. After 15 years of market-oriented government policy-making, the United States can claim the dubious distinction of having the widest disparity in incomes in the industrial world. No other industrial country spends its K-12 education resources so unequally. Poor children in the United States have the least amount of money spent on them; affluent children have the most. Market enthusiasts have only one solution to that gap: more competition — which the rich have been winning and working-class Americans losing.

The market can offer no guidance on matters of justice and fairness that are at the heart of democratic civil society and that should be at the heart of its schools and other institutions. Left to its own devices, the market is as utterly incapable of making high-quality schools available to every child, regardless of economic circumstances, as it is of providing a job for every American who needs one.

Since the market is concerned

with buying and selling, it cannot represent the interests of children. Turning children over to the market assures that they will be treated as an expense to be reduced or a resource to be harvested. In the process, some children and their families will be necessarily considered more valuable than others. For the market to produce winners, there always have to be losers.

The Market Debases Human Values

Over time, market values have eroded and debased the human values of democratic civil society. Listen closely to the language that already fills discussion about school reform. It is the language of commerce applied to human relationships. Children are defined as "future customers," "future workers," and "future taxpayers." There is little talk of the value of children in their own right — right now. There is lots of talk about "tough love" but little mention of any other kind of love.

Costs are put in terms of "the bottom line," not what justice demands. When the logic of the market is allowed to dominate society, relationships are inevitably turned into commodities to be bought and sold. And every person can be assigned a material value, either great or small. The antithesis is the democratic ideal that all people are created equal.

The debate over public education reform cannot be understood by thinking only about schools. It is part of a much broader struggle: whether America will move in the direction of its democratic ideals or be further ensnared in the logic of the market. The outcome is by no means assured. ■

Alex Molnar is a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. This article is adapted from his forthcoming book, Giving Kids the Business (Boulder: Westview Press).



Credit: Kirk

Lessons from the Voucher War

Ann Bastian

This is an editorial report from the front, four years into the Great Voucher War, the war to dismantle public education in America. I am writing as a partisan of public education who has seen a fair amount of the recent action, chiefly in my home state of New Jersey, and also in Pennsylvania, California, Colorado, Wisconsin and Ohio.

As in any war, language is an early casualty. To soften their image, vouchers are sometimes called "choice" programs and confused with public school choice and charter programs that do not privatize education rights or funding. I am talking about tuition vouchers that allow public money to fund private and parochial school enrollment, a proposition raised

education, might try to learn from this grueling experience so that we can live to fight for better causes. I've collected four lessons thus far:

Lesson 1: We are defending schools we want to change, not the status quo.

Lesson 2: Don't just mobilize, organize.

Lesson 3: If you're comfortable in a coalition, it isn't broad enough.

Lesson 4: There is an enemy. Name it.

Here's what these lessons suggest in operational terms:

Lesson 1: We are defending schools we want to change, not the status quo.

Basically, a lot of us have mixed feelings about the public education system as it is,

We can also defend schools that are changing, including some exemplary restructured public schools in those urban districts, schools that have traded in the factory model for child-centered learning. We can point to the growing number of successful Comer Schools, Key Schools, Accelerated Schools, Essential Schools, Carnegie Pilots, New Visions Schools, and scores more to prove that public schools can work even in adverse conditions. Then we can point out that these shining stars only make it more feasible and imperative to extend restructuring efforts to every school.

Most fundamentally, we can defend the universal right to public education and defend our future chances to transform the institution. What we cannot defend are schools that have failed or given up.

One key to supporting and challenging public schools simultaneously is to develop a focused agenda for local school improvement in our communities, as well as campaigns against vouchers, cutbacks and other attacks. But having a local agenda means we have to let some allies (usually inside the education system) know that we are not going to gloss over what is wrong or stop raising what needs to be done, just because schools are under hostile fire.

Building a pro-active agenda for troubled schools means it is necessary to raise difficult and divisive issues. The hardest are teaching practices, committed by fault or default, that reproduce racism, sexism, language and class bias. It is equally necessary to critique special ed placements, disciplinary double-standards, elite-centric and test-driven curriculum, segregation in the guise of tracking ... The list could go on, but it includes all the gut issues of inadequate schooling. The trick is to raise these problems in a problem-solving context, where change is seen as possible. So while we seek to create broad coalitions to defend public education, we also have to create appropriate and ongoing spaces, places, and programs where

There are crucial issues that progressive educators must address if they are to simultaneously defend and reform public schools.

in over 30 states since 1993.

This report is not really about how the Voucher War is going, which is mostly on and on. The good news is that statewide voucher initiatives have been overwhelmingly defeated in the three states where referenda have been held. The discouraging news is voucher legislation has established pilot programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland. The really discouraging news is: every Republican presidential candidate in 1996 endorsed a voucher platform and every Republican governor is looking at vouchers as a way to escape responsibility for the crisis in urban education. So despite electoral rejection—and a sketchy record showing that private school vouchers have no positive impacts on overall school improvement and highly inconsistent impacts on student achievement—the Voucher War will go on for the foreseeable future.

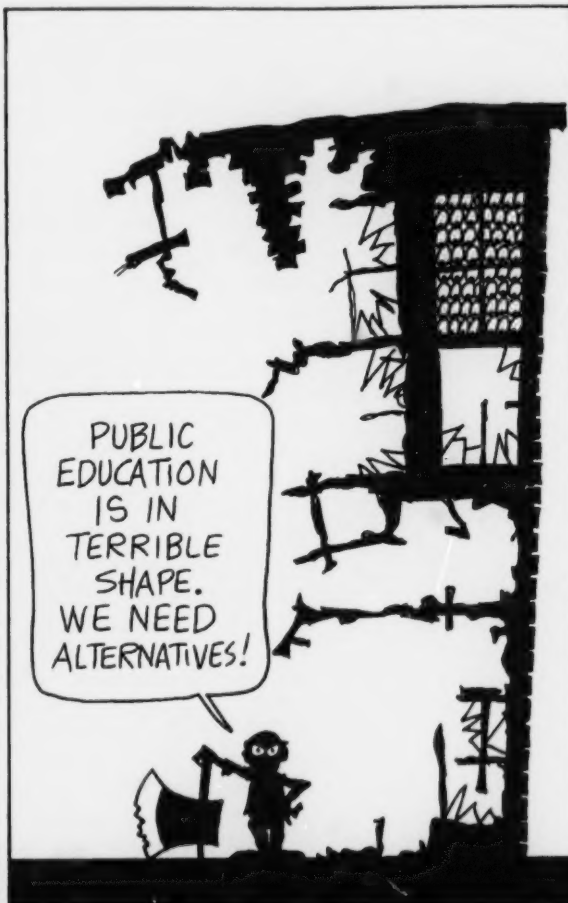
Today's report, however, is about what we, as progressive advocates for public

since it so often fails to meet its ideals and so often tolerates that failure. In New Jersey, you look at Newark and you want to weep. But if we can muster the stamina it takes to hold fast to a complex position, we can uphold the promise and the entitlement of public education, while being clear that we believe the institution needs deep restructuring. We need to convey that we are working to transform public schools at the same time we are defending them.

We can defend what works already, but not pretend that there is nothing wrong. There are real places in school crisis: twenty-five or so major urban systems, plus some hundreds of decaying industrial suburbs and dying rural districts. It is no accident that voucher warriors, having failed to win sweeping federal and statewide programs, are now targeting the most distressed urban districts for pilot programs (and back-door entry points for larger plans).

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we can struggle with educators who are obstacles to school reform, but allies in the larger war. I believe this is called fighting on two fronts. No small trick, but it's part of what makes Lesson 2 important.

Lesson 2: Don't just mobilize, organize.

Voucher battles are demanding and expensive because they are an all-out assault on the integrity of public education. We cannot afford to lose in any state, without losing equity mandates, economies of scale, and community investments that have taken decades to achieve. Whether wholesale or piecemeal, privatization would fracture the coherence of the public system and particularly its obligatory, if often grudging, commitments to the neediest students. So the stakes are very

high. We must learn to fight negative and defensive battles in ways that increase rather than deplete our energy for education politics.

The problem is that we have been drawn into an endless series of defensive mobilizations and are in danger of becoming exhausted. Here's a sobering example: the fight against Prop. 174, the 1993 voucher initiative in California, cost the California Teachers Association roughly \$16 million in campaign expenses; millions more were spent by allies, which included the PTA, League of Women Voters, the AARP, civil rights organizations, labor unions, business leaders, social service providers, and more. The proposition was defeated by a 70%-30% margin, a resounding victory. The problem is that voucher proponents are vowing to come back with another voucher referendum in California, just as

they are continuously submitting voucher legislation and amendments in other states.

Conservatives have deep pockets and the Right has rabid benefactors. If they can't deliver a voucher A-bomb, they are willing to fight a war of attrition, to launch a state of siege. They are using voucher battles to build memberships, scare officeholders, identify new allies, reach deeper into local communities, connect organizations, capture media attention, control the public debate, and develop their own leaders and candidates. This is organizing.

Mobilizing is when you activate those who are already enlisted in the cause. It is represented by media campaigns, rallies on the Capitol steps and get-out-the-vote drives, and is the main way we have fought

continued on page 20

voucher battles so far. All of these actions are necessary, but they are not sufficient for protracted warfare. We need to use mobilizations and work beyond them to organize new bases of support. We need to increase the numbers, the diversity, the understanding, the leadership, the solidarity and the energy on our side; these should be the real measures of progress from every voucher battle.

Whatever organization we work out of—a school, a parents' organization, a teachers' union, a youth program, a community organization, a public interest group, a civic association—we need to start rounding up the unusual suspects and reach out to the unorganized. Don't forget the grandmothers, the new immigrants, the trailer parks, or young people themselves. We need to get beyond the all-or-nothing style of activism that mobilizations encourage, so that more than overcommitted activists can join and so that the overcommitted activists can recover.

Then we need to provide a range of ways to get and stay involved after the voucher battle is suspended. People are reinventing some good approaches: a local speakers' bureau, neighborhood house meetings, an ongoing roundtable breakfast of concerned teachers and community leaders, a program for school/community dialogue around education visions and goals. It seems that sustaining an active base of support for public education also requires that we organize around what we are for, not only what we are against. Which brings us back to Build an Agenda and Educate Your Allies, Lesson One.

Lesson 3: If you're comfortable in a coalition, it isn't broad enough.

This lesson is ascribed to Bernice Reagan, who learned it and taught it in the southern civil rights movement. It certainly applies if you adopt an organizing approach to education politics, which is about building new bases and broader alliances. The problem in the Voucher War is that most of our coalitions have been only at the leadership level, neither broad nor deep enough. My observation of traditional leadership coalitions is that everybody in the room already knows each other, they have probably met before on some legislative campaign, they are pro-

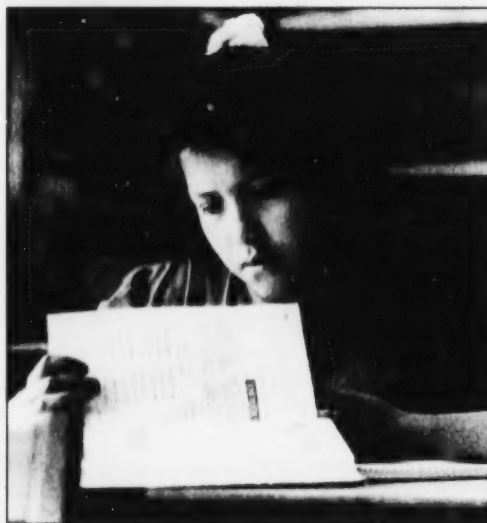
fessional staff or officers of their organizations, they speak a distinct institutional language. They may not all look alike, but they somehow look similar. This is a fairly reliable observation if the leadership coalition has formed at the state level, but it also seems to happen in local coalitions.

Vouchers battles are opportunities to build new kinds of alliances. Rebuilding a strong base for public education means seeking new blood, both at the top and at the grassroots level. It means coalitions made up of groups that are large and small, mainstream and sidestream, staffed and voluntary, and genuinely representative when it comes to race, ethnicity, national origin, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, and whatever else the Right attacks.

We can use voucher battles to begin building coalitions and networks of allies at the community level. Usually, it requires one core organization to take the initiative. Often the teacher's union is in that position, with staff and resources, but a great many union locals are trapped by isolation from the community and a fixation on their contract. One of the deepest frustrations of community advocates defending public schools is dealing with unions that are so entrenched in narrow agendas and business as usual that they can't see how profoundly the politics of education has changed.

On the other hand, my experience in several states and cities—Pennsylvania, Washington State, California, Cleveland and even Jersey City—indicates that some unions are waking up to new alliances and that they are essential organizations in this fight. So are parents groups, school support personnel, school boards, other unions, and civic and religious groups concerned about educational opportunity and the separation of church and state.

However, creating new alliances that get beyond the top-down insider model means learning some new skills. We need



Credit: Mark Ludak/Impact Visuals

to work at expanding cultural comfort zones (more accurately, expanding your acceptable discomfort zones) and burying old grievances (probably the last contract fight or bond issue). We need to better understand all the sectors and social forms that make up a community (asking others about themselves) and to identify educational injustice with other social causes (like funds for Midnight basketball). We need working groups and teams that mix constituencies and don't keep us each in our safe and narrow havens. Above all, we need to forge long-term relationships rather than deals.

Lesson 4: There is an enemy. Name it.

It is remarkable how often a voucher battle erupts and people think it is just happening in their own backward city or state, as a sort of random product of nasty times. The fact is that voucher plans are not acts of God or tests of character. They are not a punishment for bad deeds in the past lives of school administrators. They are not what voters are demanding after the drop-out rates are announced. They are not even the outgrowth of an educational experiment somewhere that shows promising results. While a variety of groups and individuals may support vouchers for their own reasons, vouchers are the agenda of the political Right in this country and we ought to know it and say it. Voucher battles are opportunities to expose the Right's agenda.

Privatizing public education is the centerpiece, the grand prize, of the right wing's overall agenda to dismantle social entitlements and government responsibility for social needs.

The Right has been putting forward vouchers for decades, but with real vengeance since the Reagan years. To privatize public education is the centerpiece, the grand prize of their overall agenda to dismantle social entitlements and government responsibility for social needs. Vouchers also serve a political function for the Right, whether they win or lose. Vouchers unify the different strands of the Right: business entrepreneurs looking for a new public carcass to feed on, having used up the Cold War; anti-government libertarians who worship the free market, having noticed that education is the society's largest public institution; social and religious conservatives who want to break down the separation of church and state, while garnering public funds to run their own schools. Many issues divide the Right; vouchers unite them and provide an organizing platform.

The importance of exposing this agenda is to combat both political fatalism and the myth that voucher campaigns are concerned with saving sinking school systems or rescuing drowning children. Look at the Milwaukee or Cleveland programs, or the proposals for Jersey City or Philadelphia, and you see the most cynical power politics: the Heritage Foundation's game plan for state by state privatization, the Landmark Legal Foundation's search for the new Supreme Court case on church and state, ambitious governors pandering to the Right and hoping to escape from court orders on desegregation or funding equity, and a flock of campaign strategists looking for new wedges into the Catholic vote or besieged communities of color, traditionally Democratic strongholds.

Understanding the role of the Right on vouchers should remind us that there is a very broad spectrum of people who do not

share this agenda or this set of political purposes. Understanding the Right's voucher agenda also reminds us that this really is a war, a modern civil war, with vast collateral impacts. This is a war over society's resources and over our most basic social values: whether education should be obligated to serve all children equally and well, whether education should be governed by the democratic process or the economic marketplace, whether schools will represent common ground or contending private and sectarian interests, whether schools should belong to communities and serve as community institutions. I wish all the military metaphors were not so appropriate. We will surely have achieved a better world when we can use cooking, gardening, or building a house to describe the politics of education. But in launching its voucher offensive, the Right uses a perverse military logic: we must destroy the public schools in order to save them. In fighting vouchers, we need to speak the logic of democracy: we must save the public schools in order to advance them. ■

Ann Bastian is a Senior Program Officer at the New World Foundation, an education policy consultant, and a history teacher.

Resources for Fighting Vouchers

Center for the Preservation of Public Education, National Education Association, Washington, DC: state updates, action guides, research overviews, NEA contacts. 1201 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-822-7700.

National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty, New York, NY: resources on voucher debates, the role of the Right and church-state issues. 165 E. 56th St., New York, NY 10022. 212-750-6461.

Art Must, ed., *Why We Still Need Public Education*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY, 1992. Short essays on privatization, choice options, and the role of public schools. 716-691-0133

Ed Doerr, Albert Menendez and John Swomley, *The Case Against School Vouchers*, Americans for Religious Liberty, 1995. Myths, facts, history in the voucher debate. Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20916.

Resources for Agenda Building

Anne Henderson et. al., *Supporting Our Kids*, Center for Law and Education, Washington, D.C., forthcoming Fall 1996: notebooks on programs, campaigns and tools to restructure local schools for parents, communities and teachers. 197 Friend St., 9th Flr., Boston, MA 02114.

Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Chicago, IL, 1995: lessons and resources from big city decentralization and school restructuring efforts, primarily for activists and educators. The Cross City Campaign will also have forthcoming publications on school-based budgeting, small schools, accountability and parent organizing. 407 S. Dearborn #1725, Chicago, IL 60605.

The Good Common School, National Coalition of Advocates for Students, Boston, MA, 1991: a guide to restructuring elementary schools for parents, communities and teachers. 100 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02130.

Doubts and Certainties, newsletter on school transformation from the Center for Innovation, National Education Association, Washington, D.C.: local school restructuring programs and resources, primarily for teachers. 1201 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-822-7700. Available through private mailing list.

The GI Bill Doesn't Vouch for Vouchers

By Robert Lowe

Proponents of educational vouchers have cleverly packaged their proposals in language that makes them sound like irrefutably good policy. Labeling such proposals "choice," for instance, suggests an expansion of options and opportunities that obscures the inequities built into them. Even more powerful than "choice," however, is the common practice of tout-ing vouchers as a new G.I. Bill. Former President Bush's federal voucher plan was called a "G.I. Bill for Children," and advocates of state-level voucher plans invariably use similar language. The association of vouchers with the G.I. Bill, in fact, has a history that traces to the writing of Milton Friedman, the conservative economist who made the first modern case for vouchers back in the mid-1950s. Although



Credit: Milwaukee Public Schools

Voucher supporters who try to link their proposals to the GI Bill distort both both history and the nature of elementary and secondary education.

Friedman did not press the analogy as far as recent proponents, the comparison always has served to cast vouchers in the radiance of universally popular legislation that did indeed massively broaden educational opportunity following World War II.

Current advocates of vouchers claim that the provision of a stipend to each child for redemption at the public or private school of a family's choice will resemble the G.I. Bill and have similar consequences. It will improve the overall quality of education by forcing public institutions to compete for students with private ones; it will extend to families who currently can't afford private schools the same opportunities that the well-to-do possess;

and by directly aiding parents it will make government subsidized enrollment in parochial schools constitutionally allowable. These comparisons, however, distort the nature of the G.I. Bill and make inappropriate connections between that bill and school voucher initiatives. Indeed, the G.I. Bill no more resembles current voucher proposals than the G.I. series resembles a test for cholesterol.

Flawed comparisons begin with a failure of analogy-makers to recognize the intent of the G.I. Bill and to adequately account for its consequences. Most advocates of the original G.I. Bill were not interested in education *per se*. Fearing the potential for social unrest spawned by many thousands of unemployed veterans,

proponents of the G.I. Bill viewed its educational program as a way of keeping former soldiers out of a labor market considered incapable of absorbing them. Essentially irrelevant to primary and secondary education, the bill did have a highly beneficial effect on higher education. But the betterment of colleges and universities was not intended, nor was it fundamentally accomplished through competition over students. Rather, the G.I. Bill stimulated a vast increase in applicants following World War II, which resulted in more than enough new students to go around. As of 1947, according to history professor Keith Olson, veterans composed 49% of college students, and their presence allowed dramatic growth in enrollment at many institutions.

Nonetheless, competition over students did thrive among proprietary schools, a high percentage of which were newly minted with the hope of reaping bonanzas from the tuition-bearing former soldiers. The unethical practices of many of these for-profit enterprises provide little support for voucher advocates' faith in mar-

ket forces. In fact, the problem was great enough that the G.I. Bill was modified so that only institutions with state approval could redeem veterans' stipends, and further oversight was exercised by the Veterans Administration. Even then, complaints about false advertising and high incompleteness rates would persist through subsequent versions of the G.I. Bill.

The flourishing of higher education in the post-war era was not due to competition, but it was in part due to the enrollment of so many highly motivated, mature students who previously would not have had the means to attend four-year colleges. Olson has estimated that 20% of those who enrolled in colleges and universities could only have done so with the support of G.I. Bill funds. The enrollment of African Americans, in particular, rose dramatically.

Full-Tuition Grants

This expansion of opportunity was made possible by generous tuition grants and additional stipends that partly offset the cost of living. Initially veterans received \$500 annually for tuition and expenses, along with \$50 a month for a single person and \$75 for a married couple. Although this sounds trivial in today's dollars, in 1948, \$500 paid all but \$25 of Harvard's tuition and was more than enough to pay the tuition of nearly all other colleges in the country.

In contrast, the modest grants proposed by current statewide voucher plans would only pay a fraction of the tuition at most good private schools. California's Proposition 174, for example, would have provided vouchers of approximately \$2,600 at a time when the average tuition of private schools was around \$7,000. Had the voters approved it, the voucher program would have been a G.I. Bill in reverse that subsidized the tuition of the well-off, reduced the level of required state aid to public schools, and left the poor with few meaningful options.

Under the G.I. Bill, colleges prospered financially, since the bill vastly expanded the pool of those who could pay the cost of tuition and then some. It is hardly surprising that many colleges were able to increase their tuition and fees without

fear of a diminishing student supply. In addition, the Lanham Act funded the construction of educational facilities required by the influx of veterans. Thus, colleges and universities were not expected to do more with less resources, as voucher supporters claim public schools should be able to do. On the other hand, it is the case that voucher schemes, like G.I. grants, would allow private elementary and secondary schools to raise their tuition.

This financial benefit to private schools, however, would be exacted at the price of placing even more of them beyond the reach of people without the money needed to supplement their vouchers.

A final argument of voucher supporters

is that the G.I. Bill, which has allowed veterans to attend secular or non-secular colleges, demonstrates that it is constitutional for voucher programs to include parochial schools. Their contention is that no violation of separation between church and state exists as long as individuals rather than institutions are provided with tuition money. What is at issue here, however, is not so much who gets the money, but whether the primary effect of this government aid is to advance religious institutions.

Unless this long-accepted principle is rejected by the Supreme Court, the current proposal of Wisconsin Governor

continued on page 24



Credit: Rick Reinhard

Tommy Thompson to include religious schools in the Milwaukee Parent Choice Program is unlikely to be found constitutional. This is because sectarian schools would become the chief beneficiary of the program, which is restricted to low-income students whose vouchers can only be used at private schools. On the other hand, it is too close to call whether the current Supreme Court would find constitutional an inclusive program, in which there would be vouchers for all children that could be redeemed at public or private schools.

Since the vast majority of post-secondary institutions are secular, the G.I. Bill has not fundamentally advanced the interests of religious institutions. But the issue is not merely a matter of numbers. The Supreme Court also makes distinctions between religious institutions at the collegiate level and those on the primary and secondary ones. In *Tilton v. Richardson* (1971), for instance, the Court found permissible government grants to religious colleges for construction projects used for secular purposes. Put briefly, it maintained that no excessive entanglement between church and state would follow from such a practice. In contrast to

with impressionable children that religion will permeate the area of secular education, since religious indoctrination is not a substantial purpose or activity of these church-related colleges ..."

A New G.I. Bill

That the G.I. Bill does not meaningfully resemble voucher proposals should be obvious. Yet there is value in considering what a new G.I. Bill would look like. One obvious approach would be to restore to the current G.I. Bill the high level of benefits veterans received under the original one. According to Reginald Wilson of the American Council on Education, veterans today, among whom African Americans are significantly overrepresented, are eligible for benefits that have diminished



Credit: Skjold Photographs

If we would like to emulate the GI Bill, one important step would be to vastly increase the value of Pell Grants for college tuition.

viewing parochial elementary and secondary education as being suffused with religion, it held that religious institutions of higher education typically resemble secular ones in their commitment to academic freedom, in the substance of their curricula, and in the employment of many faculty who are not affiliated with the religion of the college. Additionally, the Court pointed out that the greater maturity of college students makes them far less subject to religious indoctrination than children. Thus, the Court concluded that for non-secular colleges there was "less danger ... than in church-related primary and secondary schools dealing

to about 50% of college costs. This partly accounts for why nearly two-thirds of those who qualify do not participate in the program.

Not only would greater educational benefits attached to the current G.I. Bill expand opportunities to those of modest means, but even more far-reaching would be a major increase in the value of Pell Grants. Initiated by the federal government in 1972 to help low-income families pay the cost of college tuition, the value of these grants, according to *The New York Times*, has declined approximately 15% since 1980, while the cost of tuition has risen some 50%. The increasing need to

rely on loans is a major disincentive for low-income people to attend college. Remediating this situation obviously requires a significantly enhanced federal commitment to educational funding, the very opposite of the stance of conservatives who glibly conflate the G.I. Bill with vouchers.

The above proposals, like the original G.I. Bill, are clearly not meant to reform pre-collegiate education, and are no substitute for the need to transform schools that so frequently show contempt for the capacities of the poor in general and African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans in particular. But reinvigorated college scholarships would provide incentive for many low-income students to successfully negotiate high school as a means to greater opportunities beyond. ■

Robert Lowe is an editor of Rethinking Schools and teaches at National-Louis University.

Vouchers Would Devastate Our Country's Urban Schools

By Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)

The American public school system is responsible for the education of approximately 90% of our nation's children. Therefore, the last thing this country can afford to do is to divert scarce resources from our already hurting public schools to fund private school education. That is what would happen under school "voucher" plans supported by many leading Republicans and other conservatives.

As states experience budgetary crises, we must decide and act on meaningful reforms that will enable our educational system to better respond to the needs of our young people. "Choice" is not a reform—it is an abandonment of American children and teachers who rely on our public system for education and job opportunities. Contrary to claims, the school choice proposal will be devastating for urban, minority, and poor students who desperately need quality education.

Private schools are not governed by federal, state, or community public policies. While some might wield this fact to support expanding choice to include private schools, such a move will simply amount to an open season on the hard-won civil rights gains our country has made in the last 30 years. Private schools, for instance, are free to discriminate—they may accept anyone by their own choosing, and you can be sure that those who will be rejected will be those students who require

At a time when our schools need serious and dramatic change, vouchers are a smokescreen that only divert attention and resources.

higher cost services such as special or remedial education.

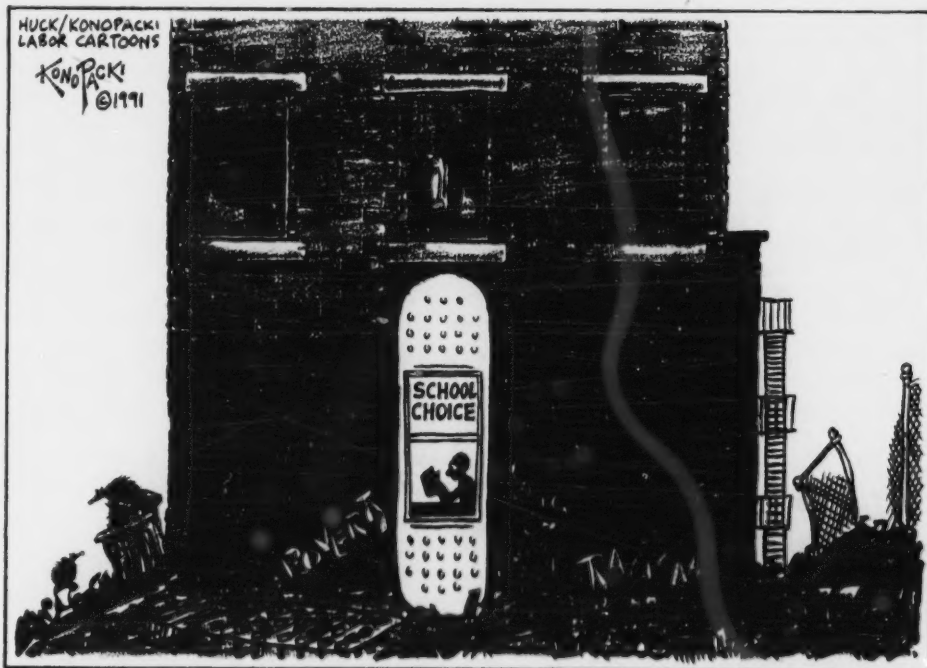
The widely acclaimed Americans with Disability Act, civil rights legislation, and laws governing the use of defamatory materials have no bearing on the functioning of private schools; and if students should misbehave, fail to perform adequately, or simply not fit the mold, no uniform standard shall regulate how their cases will be handled—opening the floodgates for preferential treatment.

Our taxpayers' dollars should not be used to support privately owned, elite academies. Neither should taxpayers support

sectarian institutions or religious schools, as prohibited by our constitutional mandate separating church and state.

Tragically, at a time when our children need and deserve serious, thoughtful, and dramatic change, the best that "choice" advocates can do is offer a smoke-screen that diverts attention and resources from our nation's poorest and "at-risk" students. ■

Maxine Waters, a Democratic Congresswoman from Los Angeles, is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and of the House Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee.



Credit: Huck Konopacki Labor Cartoons

Lessons of Chile's Voucher Reform Movement

By Martin Carnoy

Voucher plans have been in place for many years in other countries. Contrary to the claims of pro-voucher advocates in the United States, the experience internationally suggests that voucher plans promise a lot but may actually be worse for children from low-income families, for whom the gains are supposed to be the greatest.

"The primary negative effect of school choice is its natural tendency to increase the educational gap between the privileged and the underprivileged," John Ambler, referring to voucher plans in Britain, France, and the Netherlands, wrote in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (1994).

The most interesting comparison is from Chile, which has a long-standing voucher plan where pupils have been assessed regularly. The Chilean plan began in 1980 under the Pinochet military government as part of an overall "de-governmentalization" free-market package. It meets almost all the conditions of those in the United States who advocate "choice with equity," including fully subsidized, deregulated private schools competing head-on for pupils with deregulated municipality-run public schools in all metropolitan neighborhoods, from middle-class suburbs to low-income barrios.

One key feature of the Chilean plan was privatizing teacher contracts and eliminating the teachers' union as a bargaining unit. Teachers were transferred from the public employee system to the private sector. By 1983, even public schools, meaning those schools run by municipalities, could hire and fire teachers without regard to tenure or a union contract, just like any un-unionized private company. Another feature was to release all schools from the previously strictly-defined structure of the national curriculum and from national standards.

What were the results of this reform? The first was that even when parents' contributions are included, total spending on education fell quite sharply after increasing in the early 1980s when the central government was paying thousands of teachers severance pay as part of privatizing their contracts. In 1985, the federal contribution was 80% of total educational spending, and total spending was 5.3% of Gross National Product (GNP). Five years later, the federal portion was 68% of the total, and the total had fallen to 3.7% of GNP. Private spending rose, but not quickly enough to offset the drop in real federal contributions. Most of the decrease in federal subsidies to education came at the secondary and university levels, where per student public spending dropped drastically.

The second result was that in Chile, as in Europe, those who took advantage of the subsidized private schools were predominantly middle- and higher-income families.

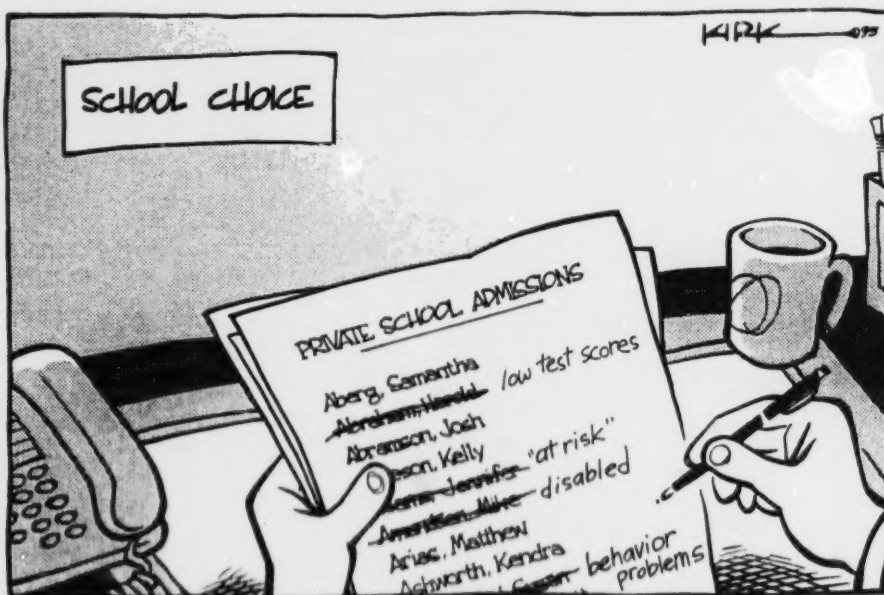
Who Goes to Private Schools?

Chile offers a voucher to all students. "Fees" often are charged at the private schools on top of the voucher, and private schools are allowed to screen students. (There are also elite private schools which do not take part in the voucher plan, where students' families pay the complete tuition.) As a result of the voucher reform, there was a massive shift of students into private schools, in particular middle-class and upper-middle-class children. By 1990, of families in the lower 40% of the income distribution, 72% attended municipal public schools. In the next highest 40% income bracket, only 51% of the families sent their children to public schools, with 43% in subsidized private schools and 6% in elite private schools where parents paid the full tuition. And in the top 20% income bracket, only 25% had their children in public schools, with 32% in sub-

sidized private schools and 43% in elite private schools.

The third result was that the increase in pupil achievement predicted by voucher proponents appears to have never occurred. Scores in Spanish and mathematics from two nationally standardized cognitive achievement tests implemented in 1982 and 1988 for fourth graders registered a national decline of 14% and 6%, respectively. According to World Bank economist Juan Prawda, the test scores fell most for low-income students in public schools, but they also fell for low-income students in subsidized private schools. Middle-income students had small increases in test scores whether they were in public or subsidized private schools. Subsequent tests in 1990 showed increases of 9% in Spanish and 11% in math, but this still left scores about the same as in 1982. Middle-income students averaged higher scores on these tests in private schools than in public, but lowest-income students tended to do better in public schools. University of Georgia political scientist Taryn Rounds' estimates of pupil achievement as a function of type of school, location, parents education, and students' socio-economic class using the 1990 test results confirm that lower-social-class students did better in public schools on both the Spanish and math tests, and middle-class students did better in subsidized private schools.

Because low-income parents were less able to add private contributions to the voucher amounts, private schools in Chile were apparently not that interested in doing any better than public schools with lower-income pupils. If the declining scores in Chile's municipal public schools mean anything, it is that increased competition had a negative effect on student achievement, and that the Chilean voucher plan contributed to greater inequality in pupil achievement without improving the overall quality of education.



Credit: Kirk

Some analysts in Chile claim that subsidized private schools cost less because they have somewhat higher pupil-teacher ratios and pay their teachers lower salaries. But there is no evidence that this means that private schools are becoming more "efficient" while public schools lag behind. Indeed, if private schools are consistently "creaming off" easier-to-teach students, municipal schools may have to maintain smaller classes with more highly paid teachers just to stay even academically.

The fourth result was the need to recentralize influence over the educational system once a democratic government was elected in 1990. Under the Pinochet reform, government made no effort to improve the curriculum, the quality of teaching, or the management of education, since this was supposed to happen spontaneously through increased competition among schools vying for students. It did not. Neither did municipalities or most private schools come up with incentives for improving pupil performance. Low-income municipalities were at a special disadvantage because they, even more than other municipalities, lacked the fiscal capacity and resources for school improvement. And as soon as unions were legal again, teachers reorganized themselves,

fought for higher salaries, and for the right to representation. Not surprisingly, they focused their demands on the central government, which oversees minimum salaries for both public and private schools.

Lessons for the United States

The lessons for us here in the United States are obvious, but they are not the one that privatization advocates want known. Voucher plans increase inequality without making schools better. Even more significantly, privatization reduces the public effort to improve schooling since it relies on the free market to increase achievement. But the increase never occurs. Private schools may end up producing higher achievement than public schools, but they generally do this by keeping out hard-to-manage pupils, who get concentrated in "last-resort" public schools.

There is another lesson to learn from the Chilean case. At the end of the voucher road, the case for public schools becomes more, not less, difficult. The new democratically elected government, which by U.S. standards would be considered center/left, continues to blame public school bureaucracy and lack of market incentives for the low level of achievement in municipal schools. Once a voucher plan is

implemented, many middle-class parents find that they like their children being separated from low-income students. Furthermore, teachers in public schools find that given the worsening conditions and lack of support, it is even more difficult to be innovative. This last lesson should spur public school advocates to support rapid and radical reforms of schools in inner cities now, and to emulate, sooner rather than later, those reforms that seem to be working for at-risk students.

Chile had a military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s that could impose vouchers from above and suppress opposition by force.

In a democracy, it takes highly dissatisfied constituencies to produce reforms, even if they are not the ones who ultimately benefit from them. Conservatives have figured out that the most dissatisfied educational constituencies are the poor, and will use them to dismantle public education.

Ironically, the privatization movement in the United States is gaining ground just when pupils from all groups, especially those most at risk, are making significant achievement gains and just when public school reform movements are reaching into inner cities to produce real change. To cite one example: between 1975 and 1989, the difference in average reading proficiency scores between African-American and white 17-year-olds went from 50 points to 21 points, or a gain of about half a standard deviation.

The best antidote to vouchers is to spread public school reform — fast. ■

Martin Carnoy is a professor of education and economics at Stanford University. He is the author of two recent books: Faded Dreams: The Economics and Politics of Race in America (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Fathers of a Certain Age (Faber and Faber, 1995). This article is adapted from an essay that originally appeared in Education Week.

Playing Politics with 'Choice'

By Gary Orfield

Choice is a term that is difficult to disagree with in principle, but which has no clear meaning until many blanks are filled in. In other words, it is an almost perfect political concept.

When asked whether they favored allowing choice within their district, 65% of public school parents said "yes" in a 1990 Gallup survey. Many who support choice in the abstract, however, may want a common core of educational requirements, no subsidies for religious education, maintenance of locally-based schools in their areas, enforcement of civil rights and handicapped rights in all schools receiving public funds, etc. Many who oppose increasing taxes to pay for transportation would also oppose limiting access to schools for students who cannot afford to pay for transportation. Cheap choice plans, with little provision for equalizing information among parents and providing

transportation, are likely to intensify rather than diminish inequality and racial segregation among schools, and could leave disadvantaged students in even more inadequate and isolated schools.

Voucher plans promise large impacts because the market mechanism is expected to force improvements, as parents leave weak schools and choose better ones. The argument should be very familiar because it is the deregulation argument that dominated the 1980s. Deregulation of the savings and loan industry, cable television, airlines, telephone systems, and other institutions was expected to produce huge gains in efficiency and service. There have been successes in some areas but also some spectacular failures.

The S & L crisis is already the most costly financial disaster in American history. It shows that many business leaders, freed of bureaucratic control, decided to speculate recklessly with other people's money. The airline experiment has reached

a point of diminishing competition, virtual regional monopolies, deteriorated service, less convenient schedules for many travelers, strong efforts to distort markets with frequent traveler awards, proprietary reservation systems, predatory local pricing, and other market distortions. Congress has conceded the failure of cable TV deregulation and authorized re-regulation. The romance of the self-regulating marketplace has dimmed considerably.

The school choice debate usually ignores the other major policy areas in which a choice approach has long been dominant. Among policies serving the poor, two of the most important are the Medicaid program, which allows people to choose doctors in the free market, and the Pell Grant and Guaranteed Student Loan programs, which enable students to choose colleges and other postsecondary education they would otherwise be unable to afford. These are multi-billion dollar programs based on choice and "self-regulat-



PRIVATIZING GOVERNMENT

KIRK

Credit: Kirk

ing markets."

If Medicaid made the market work for low-income black residents of the South Side of Chicago, the quality of health care should have soared as doctors and clinics rushed in to compete for the hundreds of millions of dollars of business. Just the opposite has happened. Medical practitioners have not rushed into the area and many refuse Medicaid patients. Many hospitals and clinics have gone bankrupt and shut their doors, including the city's only black-controlled hospital. Far from efficient, low-cost service, much of the treatment is extremely expensive, highly inefficient, and very inconvenient emergency room treatment of conditions neglected much too long. The system has been far more expensive than predicted, has left tremendous inequalities in place, and has produced a strikingly inferior level of care by decaying institutions.

Pell Grant and student loan experiences are similar. The grants and loans surely helped low-income students to enter college and other forms of training, but they were never able to make access equal for lower-income students. The grants were never set at high enough amounts to permit a full range of choices. Over time, as tuition soared and grants increased less rapidly, the program became more and more limited and, by the mid-1980s, the gains of the previous period were substantially lost.

In other words, there is nothing about a choice plan that can really control the cost of the institutions chosen among, or which can guarantee that government will provide a level of resources from year to year that enables real choices to be possible. Costs are, by definition, outside government's control while voucher levels are determined not by need, but by political compromise.

There is nothing in a choice system to assure either a full supply of choices at the right price or the level of support needed to make real choices available. ■

Gary Orfield is a professor of education and social policy at Harvard University. This article is adapted from Voices from the Field: 30 Expert Opinions on "America 2000," funded by the William T. Grant Foundation.

'Choice' and Public School Reform

By Robert Peterkin

The most damaging myth [about choice] is the one being advanced by the so-called free market educational experts. They contend that if poor parents are allowed to send their children to private schools at public expense the competition will force the public schools to improve. Indeed, at a national forum on choice Tuesday morning in Washington, former Governor Pete Du Pont said the Milwaukee choice program had forced the entire Milwaukee school system to turn itself upside down to try to improve.

That, Mr. Chairman, is a lie.

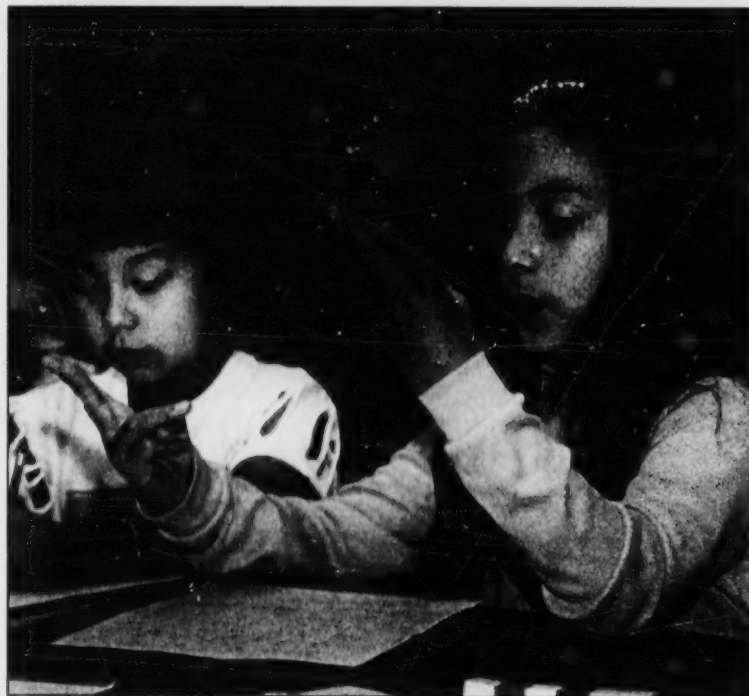
Even before my arrival two and a half years ago, the Milwaukee Public Schools Board of Directors made the decision to reform the 150 schools under its jurisdiction....

Before there was ever a murmur about choice, this district had moved to down-

size and decentralize its bureaucracy, to empower teachers and schools, to activate parents, to rewrite a dormant curriculum, to involve the greater community in the education of its children, and to establish high-level and very public standards of accountability.

Choice had nothing, I repeat, nothing, to do with those efforts which were begun by individuals of good will who held close to their hearts a burning desire to provide an education of excellence and equity to all children. ■

The above is excerpted from remarks by Robert Peterkin before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor in November 1990. Peterkin, who at the time was superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, testified on the Milwaukee public schools and the private school voucher program in Milwaukee. Peterkin is a senior lecturer at Harvard University, where he heads the urban superintendency program.



Credit: Thor Swift/Impact Visuals

What Can We Learn from Milwaukee's Voucher Program?

By Barbara Miner

As the country's only program of publicly funded vouchers for private schools, Milwaukee's small, experimental program offers a glimpse at the problems confronting any voucher initiative.

Yet the lessons one can learn from the five-year-old experiment are rarely those claimed by voucher supporters. These lessons include:

- There is no guarantee that by switching to private schools, low-income students will improve their academic achievement.
- Starting new schools is a difficult and tumultuous process, and new schools beholden only to the vagaries of the marketplace may be as likely to fail as to succeed.
- Lack of regulation and public accountability are significant problems.
- Voucher supporters concerned with the education of low-income minority children may soon find themselves at odds with those concerned with privatizing education or saving financially troubled religious schools.

• Including religious schools in a voucher proposal only increases the complexity of the issue, virtually ensuring that matters will be tied up in the courts for years.

Since the 1990-91 school year, Wisconsin has provided state dollars to low-income parents in Milwaukee attending nonsectarian private schools within the city limits. The program has so far been limited to a maximum of 1.5% of the more than 100,000 students within the Milwaukee Public Schools. In the 1995-96 school year, it gave vouchers of approximately \$3,600 to about 1,100 children. At the beginning of the year, 17 private schools were taking part. Two of those schools abruptly closed at midyear amid charges of possible criminal fraud, and two others were in such serious financial difficulty that they were unable to pay their staff.

The Wisconsin legislature voted in 1995 to expand the program to include reli-

gious schools, to lift limits on the number of children taking part, and to drop requirements that at least 35% of those at voucher schools be students who pay tuition. That expansion is on hold until the courts resolve whether, among other issues, it violates the constitutional separation of church and state. The Wisconsin Supreme Court deadlocked 3-3 in April on the expansion and the suit was sent back to the lower courts for trial.

No Proof of Academic Gains

The Milwaukee program originally was touted as a way to boost academic performance among poor children by giving them the opportunity to attend private schools. The unspoken and unproved assumption was that private schools were automatically better than public schools. Academic performance has not improved, however. The only studies of the program, by professor John Witte of the University of Wisconsin, have shown consistently that students at the voucher schools perform no better than comparable students at the Milwaukee Public Schools. The studies have also found that while there is a high degree of parental satisfaction, the number of students leaving the voucher program is high, as is teacher and administrative turnover at the private schools.

It's Hard to Start a School

While several long-standing community schools are taking part in the Milwaukee program, schools set up since the voucher program began have been more likely to fail than to succeed.

In the 1995-96 school year alone, two

voucher schools closed unexpectedly amid allegations of inflated enrollment figures and missing or fraudulent financial records. Two other schools faced severe financial and staff difficulties, causing a number of staff and students to leave.

One of the closed schools, Exito Education Center, reportedly received an overpayment of about \$90,000 from the state. The school reported in September it had 174 voucher students and 90 non-voucher students; by the time the school closed in January, it had 61 voucher students and no non-voucher students. Its director, meanwhile, faces criminal charges of issuing \$47,000 in worthless checks.

The second failed school, The Milwaukee Preparatory School, may be obligated to return up to \$300,000 to the state due to exaggerated enrollments, according to the state Department of Public Instruction. An audit could not be completed at Milwaukee Preparatory, however, because of missing financial records. Furthermore, the school's founder abruptly left town in December. In September, the school said it had 175 voucher students out of 200 students. By the time it closed in February there were about 80 students and 9 of the 12 teachers had left because they had not been paid.

In May, parents and teachers picketed at another voucher school, the Woodson Academy, complaining that the school is in disarray and students are not being properly supervised. Volunteers from the local community college were running classrooms because of staff shortages. (Seven of the school's 10 teachers had left by April after working without pay for more

The lessons from Milwaukee's five-year-old experiment are rarely those claimed by voucher supporters, and the program has raised far more questions than it has answered.

than two months.) One parent also complained that second-graders were allowed to watch an R-rated movie.

At a fourth voucher school, Medgar Evers Academy, administrators have admitted that the school's staff have not been paid regularly and that the school faces severe financial difficulties.

Lack of Accountability

The closings have highlighted what critics have long argued is a lack of accountability from voucher schools. While many voucher supporters have resisted calls for increased government oversight, Rep. Annette "Polly" Williams (D-Milwaukee), a long-time supporter of vouchers, is working with the state's Department of Public Instruction on providing at least minimal regulation. Williams introduced a bill requiring voucher schools to have articles of incorporation, a board of directors, and grievance procedures for staff and parents — but the Republican-controlled Wisconsin Senate adjourned this spring without taking action on the bill.

A number of parents have complained about fund-raising requirements and non-tuition "fees" at the voucher schools. By law, voucher schools must accept the voucher as full tuition — a safeguard meant to ensure that poor families would not be excluded from a private school because they didn't have enough money for tuition. Yet abuses have crept in. For example, some of the voucher schools wanted to charge "fees" as high as \$475. Others demanded that parents meet "fund-raising" quotas of hundreds of dollars.

Williams said she received a number of complaints from parents and their basic message "is that students and families are being screened out of the program through the use of fees, charges, and pre-academic conditions."

Williams' most controversial proposal is that voucher schools be required to administer state assessment tests similar to those for public schools. Such calls for stricter accountability have caused alarm among many voucher supporters, particularly among religious schools.

Private schools in Wisconsin are not required to meet the same accountability measures as public schools. For example,

they are not obligated to obey the state's Open Meetings and Records Law, or to make public their financial audits, employee wages and benefits, the number of dropouts, suspensions or expulsions, or their standardized test scores.

Splits Among Voucher Supporters

Differences over regulation are just one area of growing tension among voucher supporters. Williams, in particular, has increasingly distanced herself from conservative politicians and business community interests supporting vouchers.

"We have got our Black agenda and they have got [their own] agenda," Williams has said of the business community.

At heart is the growing awareness that the diverse coalition that formed to lobby for the Milwaukee program has different strategic interests — and that what was initially billed as an experimental, limited program for low-income students has, under pressure from business community forces and conservative ideologues, been consistently expanded in scope.

Business interests, for instance have sought to eliminate requirements that private schools randomly select students and accept students regardless of prior academic performance — provisions designed to curb discrimination. (Under the legislation, schools are prohibited from

discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, but are exempted from providing special services to students with exceptional educational needs. The exemption from exceptional education automatically excludes about 10% of public school students in Milwaukee.)

A number of voucher supporters would also like to lift the income caps on participating families. Currently, a family may receive a voucher only if they are at or below 175% of the federal poverty level. Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist has been the most vocal and public proponent of ending income restrictions, arguing that the current program excludes thousands of middle-class families.

Legal Questions

The attempt to expand the program to include religious schools is on hold until the courts rule on its constitutionality. But there are other legal complexities.

One of the reasons the legislation has such minimal accountability measures is because religious schools are worried about government interference. But the Supreme Court has raised questions about the lack of accountability, noting that the state's Constitution requires local governments to provide a "uniform system" of education. The issue, in essence, is whether having schools follow two different sets of rules — one for private voucher schools and one for public schools — violates that uniformity clause.

On the other hand, if the government establishes too many accountability measures for religious schools receiving vouchers, the program risks being found unconstitutional because "it would allow the government to interfere too much in the internal affairs of these church schools," notes Richard Sax, an attorney involved in the lawsuit challenging the law's constitutionality.

Voucher supporters also face the tricky issue of public opinion. If the legal issues are resolved in a way that grants religious school special privileges, Sax predicts there will be an outcry because the government "would be giving all kinds of money to these religious schools, and yet the schools wouldn't have to abide by the same laws that everybody else has to abide by." ■



Credit: Susan Lina Ruggles

Bret Schundler's Voucher Crusade for Jersey City Schools

By Stan Karp

Bret Schundler is nothing if not ambitious. Since 1992 when the former Wall Street bond trader became Jersey City's first Republican mayor in 75 years, he's been preaching the gospel of school vouchers with missionary zeal and an eye on national Republican politics. Though he's come up short in his campaign to get a voucher plan off the ground, his efforts have been a key part of what one newspaper called Schundler's "carefully cultivated credentials as chief architect of the Republican Party's experiment for urban America."

Schundler's Jersey City voucher crusade reflects both the political mileage many politicians have gotten out of vouchers and the practical limitations of moving beyond rhetoric and instituting a market system of public education.

Largely on the strength of his voucher efforts, the Wall Street Journal anointed Schundler a probable future president, while *The New York Times* called him the GOP's new "poster boy" for "a gospel of lower taxes, less government, and more police." The Mayor's own penchant for couching his plans in absurdly grandiose terms had him declaring that vouchers "would move us toward compliance with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which says parents have a prior right over the state to chose their child's education."

In recent years, Jersey City parents haven't had much control over anything when it comes to schools. In 1989, the city's 36 schools and 30,000 students (42% African-American, 35% Latino, 11% white, 10% Asian) became the first in the nation to be seized by state authorities for pervasive educational failure. The Board of Education, Superintendent and other top officials were replaced by state-appointed managers for a minimum of five years, since extended indefinitely. (The state later seized schools in Paterson, and New-

ark, New Jersey's largest district.)

Under the new state administration, many of the most scandalous practices, like those that kept deceased individuals on benefits lists, or made principalships dependent on local political patronage, have been ended. But evidence of improved student performance or significant change in the classroom is minimal. The new administration is more professional than the corrupt local apparatus it replaced, but the state takeover is largely a top-down affair. Parents and teachers have not been effectively mobilized for school-based change across the district. The needed resources have not been made available, and there is little in the state's overall performance to indicate that will happen.

But rather than pressing the state to make good on its promises, Schundler has used his position primarily to promote his voucher plan. From the start, Schundler argued, "The takeover is irrelevant."

Diverting Attention

In Jersey City, in particular, Schundler's voucher crusade diverted attention from the core issue of what the state was going to do about the school failure that precipitated the takeover. His rhetoric about how "competition" would eventually improve the public schools and his vague promises of more choices for parents did not deliver many details. Where, for example, were these nonexistent but supposedly desirable schools of choice going to come from? Schundler's real premise was an ideological one: that the

Schundler's crusade reflects both the political mileage many politicians have gotten out of vouchers and the limits of moving beyond rhetoric and instituting a market system of public education.

educational future of Jersey City's children should be turned over to the "free market." In practice, this mainly meant to the local Roman Catholic Archdiocese, which had approximately 1,000 vacant slots available in its parochial schools. In fact, pumping students and funds into religious schools was one of Schundler's expressed aims.

Only two decades ago, more than half of Jersey City's students attended Catholic schools, but a large percentage of them closed as the city's racial and class population changed. Reversing this trend has been one of Schundler's primary objectives.

"Every time an additional child goes into the public school system," he has argued, "it costs taxpayers another \$9,000."

The unspoken premise is that it makes more sense (and costs less money) to subsidize private options for the privileged and the middle class than to invest the resources in the public system needed to provide quality education for all.

The specifics of Schundler's plans have undergone repeated revision in an effort to address assorted legal and political obstacles. Some of his early proposals were distinguished by the audacity with which they trampled church-state barriers, and the aggressiveness with which they encouraged an exodus from the public system. In one scheme, for example, the value of Schundler's vouchers grew as more students transferred. Schundler's plan was also one of the first to propose making public funds available to students already attending parochial schools. In

response to criticism that his vouchers would fall short of the average tuition in Jersey City's parochial schools, not to mention the relatively few slots available in more exclusive private schools, Schundler's later drafts increased the size of vouchers for poor kids. Provisions were also added to promote alternative or magnet programs inside the public system, as well as "charter schools" which would be under the authority of the state, but not the local district. In general, these features were afterthoughts designed to make the core of the plan — vouchers for private and religious schools — more palatable.

Schundler Fails at State Level

Schundler, however, has been unable to get legislation passed at the state house for several reasons. There has been opposition from some key Republican legislators, like State Senator John Scott, who fear that vouchers would open the door to increasing state regulation of private and religious schools. And despite rhetorical support from Gov. Christine Whitman, much of the Republican Party in the state is aligned with economic conservatives who still hesitate to endorse the wholesale dismantling of public education. Their agenda for schools tends more towards imposing state curriculum standards and testing than it does towards an unrestricted (and ultimately expensive) voucher system. New Jersey's 600 gerry-mandered school districts already do a good job of reproducing class and racial inequality in a state with the nation's fourth most segregated schools. Those who benefit are not anxious to allow wholesale crossing of district lines, even in the name of the free market.

Still another factor is the relative weakness of the Christian right in New Jersey. While there is extensive support among the Catholic hierarchy for a voucher plan,

Schundler has not been able to count on the sort of grassroots right-wing groups that have fueled voucher crusades elsewhere. And, despite the crisis of urban school failure and the desperation of many parents of color, Schundler has had no prominent political allies in the Black or Latino communities.

Another reason is that the New Jersey Education Association initiated a broad anti-voucher coalition. Though a powerful force in state politics, the NJEA has frequently found itself isolated in recent public battles over education, partially due to its often short-sighted policies. But on this issue, the NJEA helped bring together groups with a common stake in opposing vouchers. The coalition, Community Advocates for Public Education, includes Jewish organizations, the ACLU and others concerned with church-state issues, the NAACP, the Urban League, bilingual educators, and others who see vouchers as a threat. School boards, administrators, retirees, trade unions, and some parent groups are also included.

All this has been extremely frustrating

to Schundler. When Whitman saw last year that the voucher proposal was headed for defeat, she dumped it in the lap of yet another commission for study. The Governor also had more pressing items on her education agenda. She is attempting to develop statewide curriculum standards and sidestep a landmark court decision that ordered the state to equalize spending between poor districts like Jersey City and the wealthiest districts. Pursuing a divisive issue like vouchers while trying to amass a legislative coalition around these other issues was counterproductive. "Almost everything is on the back burner to how we are going to finance education," explained Education Commissioner Leo Klagholz.

Although the commission came back early this year with yet another version of a voucher plan, it has failed to find support in the legislature and the proposal is currently languishing. A related, compromise bill setting up charter schools was passed instead.

Despite these setbacks, Schundler is not likely to give up. Vouchers remain a useful tool for political posturing about education and a potential way to allow a small number of people to buy their way out of public schools. And they do so in the interests of a much broader political agenda. "If I can get school vouchers in Jersey City," says Schundler, "it will change the face of American education and establish a new paradigm for government which will change how we provide governmental services."

Schundler's voucher proposals remain a potential battering ram that could punch holes in the public treasury and drain vital resources from public schools at the very time they are struggling for survival. ■

Stan Karp is a Rethinking Schools editorial associate and teaches English and journalism at J.F.K. High School in Paterson, N.J.



Credit: Susan Lima Ruggles

Choice, Chelsea, and Clinton

By Robert Lowe

Conservatives who support vouchers have read hypocrisy into President Clinton's decision to send daughter Chelsea to an expensive private school. In contrast, many liberals who oppose vouchers have been quick to affirm the right of the President to choose the school that will best serve his daughter.

Conservatives in this case make the more consistent argument, even though their claims for vouchers are ultimately false. Put briefly, they maintain that the President's choice of a private school demonstrates that he finds the public schools of Washington, D.C., unworthy of his child. Yet in opposing vouchers he is denying low-income parents the right to exercise the choice of attending a private school. In other words, public schools aren't good enough for the President's child, but they'll have to do for poor people's children. Conservatives are right that this hardly seems fair. Their own solution, however, would scarcely be fair either.

A voucher system would indeed permit all children to attend private schools and perhaps require it in urban areas by destroying the financial base for public schools. Yet the dollar value of all recent voucher initiatives, as well as that of the only existing voucher program, the Milwaukee Parent Choice Program, is pegged too low for the children of the poor to

By sending Chelsea to a private school, President Clinton is sending the message that even the most powerful person in the world cannot chisel out of the public schools of Washington, D.C., a good educational environment for his daughter. Second, by calling his decision merely a private one, he is suggesting that the exercise of individual freedom has no social consequences. But this is rarely the case.

attend well-endowed private schools. A voucher in Milwaukee, for instance, is worth only about one-quarter of the tuition of the school Chelsea attends. Those Milwaukee private schools that accept vouchers as full tuition may have dedicated faculty and staff, but their inadequate revenue translates into a high rate of administrative and staff turnover as well as limited resources for children.

It is not surprising that University of Wisconsin professor John Witte's studies of the Milwaukee Choice Program have not found measurable gains in students' academic performance, but have found that a high percentage of students leave the program each year (46.5% left during the first year or did not return the following September; the comparable figure for the second year was 35%.) At bottom,

despite the focus on vouchers for low-income students in Milwaukee, most voucher proponents are really interested in subsidizing middle class parents' efforts to enroll their children in private schools.

Clinton Not Off the Hook

The false promise of vouchers, however, does not get Clinton and his liberal apologists off the hook. We all are formally free to choose the best for our children, but the meaningful exercise of this freedom depends on our means. Good schools, like good health care and housing, are not equally available to all. The best schooling typically goes to those who have the most money and the worst goes to those with the least. As Jonathan Kozol has maintained in *Savage Inequalities*, this is a perversion of justice. He holds that it is only equitable that children whose lives are harmed by the absence of favorable living conditions should at least get the best schools as compensation for circumstances for which they are blameless. As idealistic as this formulation might seem, it points out that the pursuit of individual freedom can be at odds with the pursuit of equality.

What does all this have to do with Bill Clinton and choosing a private education? Plenty, I think. First, though he didn't intend it, the President is encouraging those who can afford it to abandon urban public schools. In essence, he is sending the message that even the most powerful



Credit: Cleo Freelance Photo



Credit: Milwaukee Public Schools

person in the world cannot chisel out of the public schools of Washington, D.C., a good educational environment for his daughter. Second, by calling his decision merely a private one, he is suggesting that the exercise of individual freedom has no social consequences. But this is rarely the case.

In the case of education, the personal decision to choose a private school certainly tends to have social implications. For instance, on the evening of the vote on the Milwaukee school facilities referendum in February 1993, a woman exiting a voting booth told a local news reporter quite matter-of-factly that she had voted against the referendum because her children attended private schools. Her vote apparently was based on a perfectly reasonable calculation of self-interest. Given her choice of private schools, why should she increase her tax burden simply to improve the education of other people's children? Taking this logic a step further, why shouldn't parents whose children at-

tend private schools demand vouchers to subsidize their personal choices even if the consequences are ruinous for children attending public schools?

The choice of private education is an act of individual freedom that creates no natural identification with the destiny of public education. In fact, it tends to identify self-interest with an antagonistic stance toward public school support. This, in part, accounts for the defeat of the Milwaukee referendum, and the social consequences of that defeat include children without kindergartens, teachers with too many students, and classrooms in cafeterias and closets.

Of course it is true that some parents whose children attend private schools do willingly tax themselves for public schools and even labor voluntarily for public school improvement. It is also true that some children cannot prosper in public schools, and parents who can afford private schools rightly are not going to sacrifice their offspring to make a social statement. Giv-

en the prevalence of racism in schools, for instance, it makes sense when parents of color seek out an environment — public or private — that respects their children.

Nonetheless, when people choose private education — especially in its costlier forms — the connection between their children's interests and the interests of public school children are easily severed. Consequently, one doesn't see that laboring for other people's children can benefit one's own.

Private choices have public consequences. The exercise of individual freedom has social effects. If we do not employ our freedom to struggle for schools that release the intellectual and ethical capacities of all children — making them genuine stakeholders in society — we impoverish democracy and ultimately imperil our freedom as well. ■

Robert Lowe is an editor of Rethinking Schools and teaches at National-Louis University.

Captive Kids: Teaching Students to Be Consumers

By Phyllis Sides

The tendency to view schools as markets is perhaps nowhere clearer than in escalating commercialization of the classroom. Across the country, advertising in schools has exploded as corporations aggressively increase their efforts to reach what they consider "rookie consumers."

The growth in corporate influence on classrooms is documented in "Captive Kids: A Report on Commercial Pressures on Kids at School," by the Consumers Union. The 66-page booklet focuses in particular on how corporations have tried to use "free" equipment and classroom materials to get their advertising message across, and how they offer schools much-needed dollars to place their ads on school walls, buses, and sports scoreboards.

"Marketers are looking to build brand loyalty while children are young and impressionable," the report noted. And schools are seen as an undeveloped niche.

There are an estimated 43 million children in school, with spending power of over \$108 billion per year and the power to influence parental spending. They are also a captive audience.

Scholastic Inc., publisher of *Junior Scholastic* and other educational magazines, tells advertisers that it can present them "with the largest single print advertising opportunity there is to reach teens ... in a virtually non-competitive, highly-receptive, captive environment — school."

"Captive Kids" researchers evaluated more than 100 samples of classroom materials sponsored by businesses and industry boards, and found that more than half were advertising vehicles for a company's products. A middle-school curriculum from the American Coal Foundation, for instance, suggests that perhaps "the earth could benefit rather than be harmed from increased carbon dioxide" emissions.

Many prominent educational organiza-

tions, including the National PTA and the National Education Association are opposed to the continued commercialization of education and the use of students as captive audiences. "They want us to sell access to our children's minds. And we

have no right, morally or ethically, to do that," said Bill Honig, former California superintendent of public instruction. ■

"Captive Kids" is available for \$3 from Consumers Union Education Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703.

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Our Schools Need Money, Not Rhetoric about Vouchers

An interview with CJ Prentiss, Ohio Legislator

Some people advocate private school choice as the solution to the crisis facing education in this country. Do you agree?

No. I believe it is the function of the state to provide a public school system that is available to all of our children. I also believe in the separation of church and state, specifically in this instance as it relates to the use of public school dollars for vouchers.

Parents who can afford private schools have every right to send their children to them. But as an elected official, my job is to protect and improve all our children's right to a free, public education.

Improving the public school system is the only way to ensure a high quality education for all of Ohio's children. Therefore, it is my belief that models like vouchers or non-public charter schools work against this mission and only further obfuscate the state's responsibility to improve public schools.

In Ohio, we need \$10 billion to provide adequate school facilities, particularly in urban and rural areas. We also have many children who don't have textbooks or who are forced to use textbooks that are 20 years old. We have serious dropout and discipline problems. Yet in many affluent communities, school buildings are new, textbooks are up-to-date, and children are provided wonderful resources.

Clearly, some children are given more educational opportunities than others, giving them a greater chance to succeed as adults. I believe our number one challenge is addressing this inequity. For this reason, I am not willing to subordinate my efforts to a side issue like vouchers.

What should be the focus of state legislators who are concerned about our schools?

It is my belief that there are at least two

distinct public school systems in this state. One for the rich and one for the poor, with the children of middle-income parents falling somewhere in-between. Much of my energy, first as a State School Board member and now as a member of the General Assembly, has gone to eliminate this disparity.

I have repeatedly introduced legislation that calls for additional state dollars to at-risk school districts for reducing class size, opening the schools at night for community use or as family resource centers, and providing additional parent and teacher training. I am now introducing the Peaceful Schools Act of 1996, which deals with teaching children alternatives to violence.

My colleagues agree that such programs make sense, but often complain that "we don't have enough state dollars to implement them." So why are we providing money for vouchers? Using public dollars for vouchers instead of investing in programs that we know work will only delay our ability to provide a high quality education for all children.

Given the fiscal crisis facing many states, how do you convince legislators to allocate the money necessary for public school reform?

I point out the cost effectiveness of quality education. I use the slogan, and it's not new, "You either pay now or you pay later."

When you know that 40% of all pregnant teenagers are two-to-three grade levels behind, that 80% of children in juvenile detention homes read at a fifth grade reading level or below, that 60% of prison inmates are functionally illiterate, and



Credit: Cleo Freelance Photo

that 90% of those on welfare have difficulty reading, then you see the connection between success in school and success in life.

I urge my fellow legislators to see education as an "investment issue." At the point when legislators can see the connection between investing in all-day kindergarten for at-risk students and increasing the graduation rate 12 years later, then we, the advocates of full-funding for public education for all children, will know we have succeeded. ■

CJ Prentiss (D-Cleveland) is completing her third term in the Ohio House of Representatives and is a former elected member of the State Board of Education. She also serves as Chair of Education Policy for both the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus and the Black Elected Democrats of Cleveland, Ohio.

The Hollow Promise of School Vouchers

continued from page 5

ed to the sustained failure of the Milwaukee Public Schools to provide an acceptable education to low income children of color.

During 1989-90, for instance, Hispanics maintained an average GPA of 1.47 and African Americans averaged 1.31. In three of Milwaukee's fifteen high schools, between 36% and 40% of Blacks were suspended. The previous year the annual dropout rate was 17.8% for African Americans and 17.4% for Hispanics.⁷

In the face of miserable average grades and appalling suspension and dropout rates, Williams has enabled a small number of students to seek an education elsewhere — partly in community-based schools that have long served African

schools. Second, those who applied for the program were probably among the most aggressive about pursuing quality education for their children and, consequently, among the most enfranchised. Third, applications exceeded openings in participating private schools. Admission was to be based on a lottery system, but without the Department of Public Instruction monitoring the process it might have been difficult for participating schools to resist taking the strongest applicants. Even if the program were an outstanding success, it would not constitute a brief for substituting the marketplace for public schools.

The continuing praise of the Bush administration notwithstanding, there were

to maintain that public schools generally are incapable of providing effective education because the way they are governed limits their capacity to remedy shortcomings.

Chubb and Moe point out numerous problems that afflict public education today. They observe that principals cannot hire or fire teachers. They note that teachers run a gauntlet of irrelevant certification requirements, possess limited autonomy in the classroom, and are denied colleagues who share a common purpose. And they recognize that parents have little influence over the schools their children must attend. The authors identify such unsatisfactory conditions as key contributors to what they perceive as the degenerate character of education in the United States.

They further contend that many of the educational reforms mandated in the 1980s — such as longer school terms, more homework, and increased academic requirements for high school graduation — were guaranteed to fail because they were imposed bureaucratically. In fact, they see bureaucracy as the central impediment to effective schools. They believe it strangles the capacity of principals and teachers to fashion schools after their own vision and renders them unresponsive to the interests of parents. The solution to poor education, according to Chubb and Moe, is not the futile effort to impose quality through increased bureaucratic controls but to eliminate such controls.

Chubb and Moe hold that public schools are necessarily bureaucratic since in democratically controlled organizations bureaucracy is the means through which competing political interests institutionalize their influence. They argue that private schools, in contrast, tend to be autonomous because accountability does not spring from bureaucratic regulation, but from the market mechanism. If a private school fails to do an effective job, according to their reasoning, clients will leave it for another. Chubb and Moe consequently look to the marketplace to create excel-

Chubb and Moe argue that democratic safeguards are a central impediment to effective reform of public schools.

Americans and Hispanics. Under the circumstances it makes little sense to berate the program for violating the ideal of the common school or the goal of an integrated society. Such unrealized visions are inadequate justifications for denying a few children a potential opportunity to pursue an education of value. As advocates of choice are quick to point out, the Milwaukee program gives some options to low-income families that the well-to-do have long exercised, and virtually no one challenges the right of the privileged to either move to their schools of choice in the suburbs or to attend private schools.

Troubling Questions

Yet the program does raise questions. While the \$2,446 each student could bring as tuition to a private school did expand choice during the program's first year, this relatively small voucher meant that parents could not choose, if they desired, elite, overwhelmingly white preparatory

troubling signs during the program's first year. Most important, the Juanita Virgil Academy, the one school essentially created in response to the voucher-bearing clientele, suffered inadequate books and supplies from the outset and soon closed, disrupting the lives of the 63 "choice" students who had enrolled.⁸ Overall, of the 333 non-graduating students who began the program, 155 or 46.5% elected not to participate in the program during its second year.⁹ Problems within the Milwaukee Choice Program, as the following analysis of Chubb and Moe's book will indicate, multiply when "choice" expands to include everyone.

In *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, Chubb and Moe offer an elaborated version of Milton Friedman's argument. Like Friedman, they say little about equality of educational opportunity per se, but hold that education will improve for all through opening it to the competition of the marketplace. They go so far as

lence in education.

To summarize their argument, Chubb and Moe assert that public schools provide inadequate instruction because they lack the autonomy necessary to create effective education; they lack autonomy because they are bureaucratic; and they are bureaucratic because politics shapes them. Thus, they claim the way to create effective schools is to substitute the market for politics. The clarity of their argument and the simplicity of their solution, apparently buttressed by the analysis of massive data bases, may seem persuasive. But problems with their formulations abound.

False Assumptions

First of all, Chubb and Moe assume that *A Nation at Risk*, along with less influential reports of the 1980s, provides such telling evidence of educational malfeasance that drastic measures are justified.¹⁰ Serious questions might be raised about the test results marshalled to document this state of affairs. It is questionable whether standardized test scores can accurately gauge the nation's educational health, a point Chubb and Moe themselves make in another context.

Even assuming such scores have value, the strategy of *A Nation at Risk* to document both declining scores within the United States and unfavorable comparisons of scores with other countries hardly withstands close scrutiny. Its authors fail to note that their data suggest only a modest decline in scores since the 1960s. They do not acknowledge the upward trajectory of scores on several tests in the 1970s and 1980s, and they also ignore tests that showed no decline.¹¹ Further, the report inappropriately contrasts the achievement of 12th graders in the United States with those of other countries, since the groups are not comparable. Most students in the United States reach the 12th grade, and a high percentage progresses beyond. In many other countries only an elite group completes high school. Thus international comparisons beneath the collegiate level have limited utility.¹²



Credit: Rick Reinhold

Lack of evidence indicating "a rising tide of mediocrity," to use the unfortunate phrasing of *A Nation at Risk*, in no way suggests that children of color are receiving an adequate education. But it undercuts the justification of a market-based educational system for all based on the assumption that nothing could be lost by dismantling public schools. More important, Chubb and Moe fail to prove that private schools do a better job than public ones. Scholars have raised a number of questions about the data Chubb and Moe relied upon, including whether a brief multiple-choice test adequately documented student performance and whether the private school sample over-represented elite preparatory schools.¹³ Although many Black and Latino families have avoided the degradations of miserable public schools by enrolling their children in Catholic institutions, the mere fact of private status obviously does not confer excellence on schools. Thus it is hardly surprising that recent data on achievement in Milwaukee's Catholic

schools point out a vast chasm in student achievement between those serving high-income and low-income neighborhoods, and they suggest racial differences in performance that closely parallel those of the Milwaukee Public Schools.¹⁴

Even setting aside problems with their data, Chubb and Moe's claims far outstrip their findings. Despite their argument that the autonomy they associate with private schools profoundly affects student performance, in their model autonomy accounts for a tiny percentage of variance in achievement. Thus as scholars Gene Glass and DeWayne Matthews note, "A school that moves from the 5th percentile to the 95th percentile on autonomous organization would be expected... to climb a month or so in grade equivalent units on a standardized achievement test."¹⁵ Further, Chubb and Moe cannot even truly determine whether greater autonomy creates better students or whether better students permit more autonomous schools.¹⁶ In addition, they cannot dem-

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onstrate that higher achievement in private schools stems from the way they are organized or from the select group of students who attend them.¹⁷ Finally, they fail to confront the hypothesis that the real issue is not autonomy, but wider reliance on an academic curriculum in private schools — something that can be replicated in public institutions.¹⁸

Overstating Private School Advantages

Chubb and Moe also overstate the advantages of private schools in supporting teacher professionalism. Principals tend to have greater power in private schools, but it scarcely follows that teachers are more able to act as professionals. Unprotected by unions, the jobs of private school teachers are precarious. This vulnerability can exert greater constraints on teachers' autonomy than the bureaucratic regulations common to public schools. In addition, there is nothing professional about most private school teachers' salaries. Compensation typically too meager to support a family has meant that private school positions have been most acceptable to the independently wealthy, to members of religious orders, and to families with more than one wage earner.¹⁹

Overblown bureaucracies, of course, do limit institutional change and absorb huge financial resources for little direct educational service. Chubb and Moe correctly argue that many private schools are relatively free of bureaucracy, yet Catholic schools, which enroll a high percentage of non-public students in the United States, are certainly bureaucratic institutions. More broadly, the organization of the private sector as a whole fails to confirm Chubb and Moe's notion that bureaucracy characterizes public rather than private institutions. Intricately bureaucratized corporations produce a high percentage of the nation's wealth. Business influence, in fact, had much to do with the development of bureaucratic, centralized systems of public education.²⁰ Recent developments, however, hold out the possibility that public schools, like innovative corporations, can balance bureaucracy with autonomy.²¹ Chubb and Moe offer scant attention to reform efforts in many communities that have moved toward



Credit: Ansell Horn/Impact Visuals

various forms of school-based management.²²

Further, Chubb and Moe exaggerate when they suggest that public schools are rendered incoherent by the variety of political influences that shape them. Their pluralistic notion of educational politics fails to recognize that through most of the 20th Century schools were elite-dominated. Bureaucratic structures, in part, were designed by elites at the turn of the century to remove schools from popular political control.²³ Yet altered power relations can inspire bureaucratic measures that protect the rights of minorities and the poor. Thus recent bureaucratic regulations, engendered by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, are the real objects of conservative complaint. These have promoted desegregation, bilingual education, and education of the handicapped, institutionalizing a modicum of equity in public schools as a response to the demands of those traditionally denied power. That such regulations cannot adequately

ly secure equality of educational opportunity does not mean that the market can do any better.

Chubb and Moe assume that the market will create quality education for everyone through the mechanism of choice. Yet choice certainly has not accomplished this in the private sector of the economy. If the affluent can choose health spas in the Caribbean and gracious homes, the poor must choose inadequate health care and dilapidated housing. To the extent that those with limited resources have won forms of protection, it has not been guaranteed by the play of the market, but by governmental regulation. The conservative agenda of deregulation over the past decade has eroded those protections and greatly increased the disparity between the wealthy and the poor in the United States. A market system of education is merely an extension of deregulation and promises to compound social inequities.

In the market system promoted by Friedman, Chubb and Moe, and conservative

political and corporate leaders, public taxation would guarantee relatively modest vouchers worth the same amount for every student in each state. Families, acting as consumers, would then choose the schools their children would attend. But unlike the Milwaukee program where a lottery determines admission, schools may choose as well. Chubb and Moe are adamant about this:

Schools must be able to define their own missions and build their own programs in their own ways, and they cannot do this if their student population is thrust on them by outsiders. They must be free to admit as many or as few students as they want, based on whatever criteria they think relevant — intelligence, interest, motivation, behavior, special needs — and they must be free to exercise their own, informal judgement about individual applicants.²⁴

Choosing the Advantaged

It is in their interest to choose those students who are already high achievers, and it is in their interest — especially for smaller schools — to accept those whose families can supplement the amount of the voucher they are given. Friedman's version of the plan would allow individual families the right to add their own cash to a voucher. Chubb and Moe would allow local districts to augment the value of vouchers through increased local taxation. In either case, the wealthy would have greater choice than the poor.

Advocates of an educational marketplace, then, have won a significant ideological victory by successfully labelling their program "choice" rather than the more neutral sounding "voucher." While no one in their right mind would deny families educational options, "choice" obscures the reality that those who come from economically empowered families are those most likely to be chosen by good schools. As in the marketplace writ large, what one can purchase depends on how much currency is brought to the transaction.

Choice also obscures how the already advantaged would benefit financially at the expense of the less fortunate. A reduced tax rate would provide the well-to-

do with a voucher for part of their tuition for private schools. This contrasts favorably with the current situation which requires them to pay higher taxes for public schools in addition to relying solely on their own resources if they choose private institutions. Such a tax advantage, obvious in the Friedman plan, would exist in the Chubb and Moe variant as well since wealthy districts' decisions to raise taxes above the lower limit would be offset by the abolition of federal and state-level taxation that redistributes resources to poor districts. For the poor, in contrast, the baseline vouchers would be difficult to add on to, creating a situation reminiscent of Southern Jim Crow education where vast differences existed between per pupil expenditures for Black and White schools.

construct buildings, to conduct advertising campaigns, to maintain staffing with an unpredictable number of students, and to make do with the unsupplemented vouchers those without wealth would bring. A likely result would be educational versions of fast-food conglomerates, with scripted teacher behaviors similar to the standardized patter of McDonald's order clerks. Like 19th Century charity schools, such schools would compose the bottom tier of an educational hierarchy based on privilege.

Aside from the inequities associated with a market-based approach to schooling, such a strategy raises fundamental issues of educational purpose. Should taxpayers contribute to financing schools that have no public accountability no matter how objectionable many might find their goals?

If the affluent can choose health spas in the Caribbean and gracious homes, the poor must choose inadequate health care and delapidated housing.

Under Jim Crow it was common for African Americans to supplement meager public funding by constructing schoolhouses with their own donated labor and paying teachers out of their inadequate incomes.²⁵ But Blacks could not rectify these inequities despite extraordinary sacrifices. As the scholar W.E.B. DuBois maintained, if some of these starved schools managed to achieve excellence through unusual efforts, greater funding would have made such excellence far more widespread.²⁶

A voucher system of education can provide support for long-established community-based education programs that have effectively served children of color on shoestring budgets. But as the failure of the Juanita Virgil Academy suggests, the notion that choice would create a nation of small, effective schools is a construction as mythical as the notion that the market can maintain a nation of shopkeepers. A high level of capitalization and economies of scale would be necessary to

Should the public subsidize elite prep schools, schools run for profit, schools with racist ideologies, and schools run by corporations to train future workers? Should families be regarded as entrepreneurial units charged with maximizing their children's educational opportunities? This market ethos ignores any sense of responsibility for other children's education, any obligation for community control of education, any commitment to schools as sites of democratic discourse, any need for the new common curriculum some educators are forging out of the cultural works and political struggles of the diverse peoples who have shaped the United States.

Conservatives Exacerbate Differences

It is no small irony that so many conservatives have accused the multiculturalist movement of balkanization when their own policies have profoundly exacerbated the real differences that exist between

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groups in the United States. Certainly Republicans are not solely responsible for a long history of governmental policies that have developed suburban preserves for middle-class whites at the expense of urban economies inhabited by the poor and people of color.²⁷ Yet since the early 1980s regressive tax reform, diminished social services, and a benign attitude toward the flight of manufacturing jobs beyond U.S. borders have significantly increased the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. Already by 1983, according to historian Robert Weisbrot, "the cumulative impact of Reagan's policies involved a \$25 billion transfer in disposable income from the less well-off to the richest fifth of Americans, and a rise in the number of poor people from 29.3 million in 1980 to 35.3 million."²⁸

There are now signs that the strategy of suburbanization is yielding to urban gentrification as professional jobs in the service sector replace blue-collar positions. Historian Kenneth Jackson has indicated that rising fuel, land, and housing costs, along with changes in family organization, make suburban living less desirable.²⁹ In addition, privatization is a major incentive for the affluent to resettle in cities where inadequate revenues are starving public services. Increasingly in cities, where deindustrialization and reduced federal aid have devastated public spaces, urban professionals are paying only for those services that benefit themselves. These enclaves of privilege support private country clubs, private security guards, private road repair services, and private schools.³⁰

Adding to such services, choice is a way of subsidizing urban professionals' taste for private education in environments where even the best public schools do not always accommodate them. Although virtually every city has magnet schools which disproportionately concentrate school districts' resources on college preparatory programs for middle-class children, they typically practice at least a rudimentary form of equity that requires some degree of racial balance, and they cannot guarantee admission to all white middle-class applicants. As choice invites suburbanites back to the city to enjoy their private

pursuits at the expense of reinvigorated public services, they will displace and further marginalize the poor.

In the conservative imagination the divestment of state redistributive functions does not terminate responsibility for the less fortunate. Rather, such responsibility becomes voluntary, an act of private choice. Much, in fact, is made of the public spiritedness of the affluent who voluntarily participate in contributing to the common good. Enormous publicity, for instance, has attended the offer of New York businessman Eugene Lang and several others to guarantee college scholarships to low-income school children, as well as to provide various supportive academic and counseling services to see them

None of this is to say that public schools are beyond reproach. If they adequately served children of color, interest in "choice" would be limited and efforts to secure multicultural education unnecessary. Typically, students in public schools have suffered curricula that are ethnocentric and unquestioningly nationalistic. They also have experienced wide variation in academic quality based on their race and class. Author Jonathon Kozol, for instance, poignantly describes such grave inequities between public schools, underscoring the obvious unfairness of favoring the already advantaged with disproportionate resources.³¹ Thus it might make sense to restrict choice programs to the underserved.³⁴

As choice invites suburbanites back to the city to enjoy their private pursuits at the expense of reinvigorated public services, they will displace and further marginalize the poor.

through high school. Oddly, we hear little about the federally funded TRIO programs that realized such practices worked decades ago. They have a long record of demonstrated success limited only by funding that is inadequate to reach more than a small percentage of the eligible population.³¹ Massive federal support of such initiatives, in fact, is paramount because Lange and a few other philanthropists devoted to equity are exceptions. As U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich has pointed out, the wealthy contribute a lower percentage of their incomes to charitable purposes than the poor, and what they do give is disproportionately dispensed on elite cultural activities and institutions that serve themselves. Further, Reich notes that the much ballyhooed support of corporations for public schools is less than what they receive in the tax breaks they have successfully won.³² Choice in giving, like choice in selecting private schools, provides a poor case that private spending will support the public good.

Opposition to Affirmative Action

This clearly is not what the Bush administration had in mind, however, since it steadfastly opposed affirmative action. Leading Republicans and conservative groups like the Landmark Legal Center for Civil Rights, which defended the Milwaukee Choice Program in the courts while it opposed the 1990 Civil Rights Act, merely view the Milwaukee program as an opening gambit in an effort to institute vouchers for everyone.³⁵ This agenda is explicit in a proposal for California initiated by the Excellence through Choice in Education League. The league's effort to place a state-wide measure on the November 1993 ballot mandating vouchers for all was articulated initially as a measure to serve low-income families only.³⁶

If public education has inadequately fulfilled its responsibilities to educate all, market-driven educational enterprise cannot fulfill them. At best the popularity of choice among those with the least privi-

lege should send a powerful message to public school educators that the common school for many remains a myth. It highlights the need to support a multicultural agenda that widens public discourse on equity issues and transforms public education in ways that enable people of color to exercise co-ownership of society. Yet the very idea of schools that educate people in common — drawing on the richness of diversity — is antithetical to the intent of the conservative leaders and foundations advocating choice.

Early in the 20th Century corporate elites claimed to take the schools out of politics by creating expert-run central-

ized and bureaucratic public schools. Their demand for efficiency and impartial expertise masked a politically motivated effort to replace working-class influence over education with their own influence. Today Chubb and Moe articulate the position of corporate elites who rail against the bureaucratic schools their predecessors were so influential in creating, once more claiming they want to take schools out of politics. Yet their desire to open them to the marketplace is also an inherently political strategy. It will enable the more affluent to free themselves from the yoke of all the legislative and legal safeguards people have won through the free-

dom struggles of the 1960s. It furthermore will free the rich from all public educational responsibility, striking a major blow against the current multiculturalist effort that seeks a radical expansion of democracy and a reinvigorated vision of community. The implementation of "choice" would be a victory for narrow class interest over community, accelerating the drastic maldistribution of opportunity that exists today. ■

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Notes

1. Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," in Robert A. Solow, ed., *Economics and the Public Interest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

2. The most notorious instance of this occurred in Prince Edward County where public schools were closed for five years. Blacks too were offered vouchers, but committed to desegregation they refused and many children received no formal education during that period. See J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 98-100.

3. See Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

4. See especially National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983).

5. John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990).

6. See, for instance, *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 23, 1990.

7. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 20, 1990, p. 7; October 22, 1990, p. 8.

8. John F. Witte, "First Year Report, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," University of Wisconsin - Madison, November 1991, pp. 10-11.

9. John F. Witte, "Second Year Report, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," University of Wisconsin - Madison, December 1992, p. 20.

10. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.

11. See Lawrence C. Stedman and Carl F. Kaestle, "The Test Score Decline Is Over: Now What?" *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 1985): 204-210; Lawrence C. Stedman and Marshall S. Smith, "Weak Arguments, Poor Data, Simplistic Recom-

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12. Stedman and Smith, p. 90.

13. See, for example, Peter H. Rossi and James D. Wright, "Best Schools—Better Discipline or Better Students? A Review of High School Achievement," *American Journal of Education* 91 (November 1982): 82; comments on John Witte's unpublished paper presented at 1990 meeting of American Political Science Association, *Education Week*, November 14, 1990, p. 20.

14. *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1, 1991: 1, 8.

15. Gene V. Glass and DeWayne A. Matthews, "Are Data Enough?" *Educational Researcher* 20 (April 1991): 26.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

17. On this issue see Richard Murnane, "Evidence, Analysis, and Unanswered Questions," *Harvard Educational Review* 51 (November 1981): 485-487.

18. *Education Week*, November 14, 1990, p. 20; also see Douglas Willms, "Do Private Schools Produce Higher Levels of Academic Achievement?" in Thomas James and Henry M. Levin, eds., *Public Dollars for Private Schools: the Case of Tuition Tax Credits* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 230-231.

19. See Peter W. Cookson, Jr. and Caroline Hodges Persell, *Preparing for Power: America's Elite Boarding Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 84-93.

20. David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), part IV.

21. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Corporations* (New York: Harper and Row), p. 318.

22. Richard Elmore and Associates, *Restructuring Schools: The Next Generation of Educational Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

23. Tyack, *The One Best System*, pp. 132-133.

24. Chubb and Moe, pp. 221-222.

25. James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1861 to 1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

26. W.E.B. DuBois, "Pechstein and Pechsniff," *The Crisis* 36 (September 1929): 314.

27. Policies have included federal highway subsidies, segregationist FHA loans, zoning ordinances, and legal standing for restrictive covenants. See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 293. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985), p. 217.

28. Robert Weisbrod, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume, 1991), p. 302.

29. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 297-303.

30. See, for instance, Robert B. Reich, "Secession of the Successful," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 20, 1991, p. 42.

31. See *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 3, 1991, p. A17.

32. Reich, "Secession of the Successful," pp. 43, 44.

33. Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991).

34. From advocacy of choice programs with redistributive goals, see John E. Coons and Stephen D. Sugarman, *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 31; Henry M. Levin, "Educational Choice and the Pains of Democracy," in James and Levin, *Public Dollars for Private Schools*, pp. 36-27.

35. The Landmark Legal Center is funded in part by the Bradley Foundation — *Milwaukee Journal*, July 23, 1990, pp. 1A; for its opposition to the 1990 Civil Rights Act, see *New York Times*, October 21, 1990, p. 15.

36. *Education Week*, September 18, 1991, p. 1.

Church/State Separation a Bedrock of Our Democracy

By Marvin Frankel

The following is a summation of an excerpt from the book Faith and Freedom: Religious Liberty in America.

High among the "blessings of liberty" for which American colonists dared the Atlantic and then adopted the Constitution was the ideal of religious liberty. With some lapses and wrong turns that go with the human condition, our approach to the ideal has been close—close enough to be gratifying even for nonchauvinist Americans.

The first 16 words of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the beginning of the Bill of Rights, are these:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

The fact that they come first need not signify their firstness in importance. It is enough for present, or any, purposes that the words embody values at the heart of the understandings on which Americans of diverse religious views live at peace with one another.

While the majority of Americans may

The First Amendment is at the heart of how Americans of diverse religions have lived at peace with one another.

identify themselves as "Christian," we are not a "Christian nation" any more than we are a "white nation" merely because the majority of people in this country are, using the slovenly description of skin color, considered "white."

Some have attempted to beautify the arrogant error of labeling us a "Christian nation" by calling us a "Judeo-Christian." This only compounds the problem. Again, it is not a matter of numbers. If it were, "Islam-Christian" would soon work better should American Muslims outnumber American Jews and continue gaining rapidly on Christians.

Apart from numbers, the hyphenated adjective is used only to trivialize the differences and to obliterate history by a phony homogenization. The hyphen is scarcely large enough to conceal, and should cause no one to overlook, that more Jews than are now alive have been killed by Christians for the sin of being Jews. This is not to doubt that the regime of deadly enmity should have given way long ago to a widened effort by Jews and Christians to forgive and even to love one another. It is only to say that the route to that consummation is not charted by labels that serve as camouflage.

The broader point remains that no label, however embrace it might sound, fairly describes the "religion" of America because there is by constitutional definition no American religion.

Among the realities of life in the United States is the fact that religions so numerous and varied (one encyclopedia counted 1,347 in 1987) reside together in relative peace. This phenomenon is not fairly explained on the grounds that nobody cares very much. Millions, probably a majority

of us, care very deeply about our religion. But the commitment to religious freedom, thus far at least, runs no less deeply than our commitment to religion. And the First Amendment serves vitally to keep that commitment strong.

The essence of the wall of separation of church and state that our founding fathers so carefully constructed meant, above everything, that the new democracy was to refrain from giving money to support any church or all churches. James Madison, in his campaigns that led to the First Amendment, made it plain that the barrier was to remain absolute and total.

Madison's position was brilliantly sound when the great majority of all Americans were Protestant Christians. And its brilliance and wisdom has not abated as the number of religions in this country have multiplied. Roman Catholics at the moment, while far from a majority, are the largest single denomination. There is no telling, however, how long that will last. Islam is the fastest growing religion. Immigration is changing the unmelted mix of diverse Americans.

It would take a special combination of childishness and bravado to predict with confidence what we will look like 100 years hence. The best we can do now for our successors, then, is to leave them with the kind of framework for living together in religious peace that has held together so well for the first 200 years. ■

Marvin Frankel is an attorney who formerly served as Assistant Solicitor General. The above is a summation of an excerpt from Faith Freedom: Religious Liberty in America © 1994 by Marvin E. Frankel. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, A division of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc.



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Charter Schools: Potentials and Pitfalls

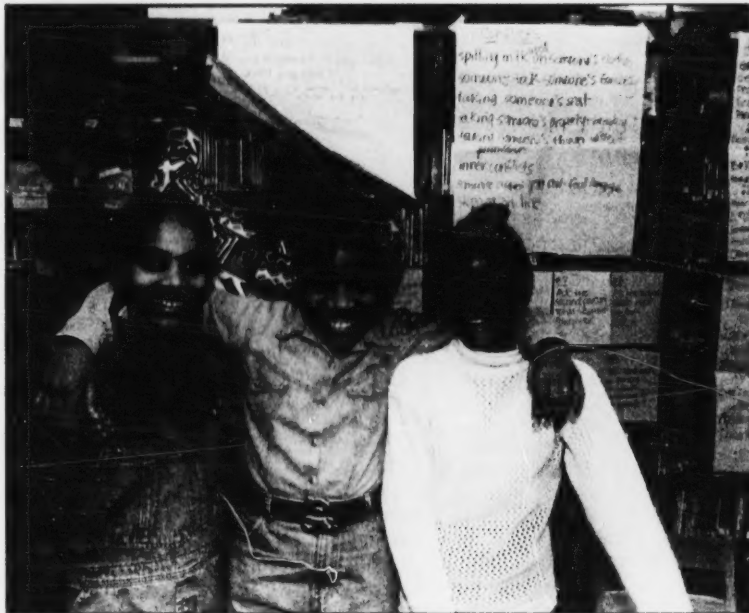
An interview with Ann Bastian

You hear the term "charter school" a lot. What exactly is a charter school?

The term "charter" means different things to different people. There are good, exciting versions of charter schools and others that are destructive to the goal of a quality public education serving all children.

In general, there are three broad categories:

First are charter schools that are created out of existing public schools by teachers, parents, and community members and that take on a new mission, or charter, and create a new kind of school. Such charter schools operate under the umbrella of the existing public school district and generally within existing regulations and union contracts. They are often called charter schools, although they may not



Credit: Carolina Kroon/Impact Visuals

There are good, exciting versions of charter schools and others that are destructive to the goal of a quality public education serving all children.

have a separate legal "charter" or special contract.

A second kind of charter school would be new schools that are started from scratch within the public school system and run under a special "charter" or contract with either the local district or the state. They tend to operate independently while still being part of the public school system, and may be exempted from some state and local regulations.

A third kind of charter, related to the second, is a newly created, independent school run by a private entity or business — the type of charter schools, for example, that would be run by the Edison Project of Whittle Communications. This

type of charter may become legally part of the public school system in a contract with the state or district, but it is not governed by the same regulations and accountability mechanisms.

Within any of these categories, you could theoretically have a good or bad school. However, I believe that the first category — which has to do with innovation within the public school system — is far more able to build and strengthen the entire public school system. In the second two categories, there tend to be more gray areas around whom the charter schools are accountable to, what educational regulations the school has to follow, and whether the charter school has a program

that can be replicated in other schools and therefore can offer a true model of reform.

Who are some of the different groups that might support charter schools?

The charter school movement is coming from different places, which is one reason why it has such different meanings.

One group that tends to support the first two types of charter schools has its roots in the effort to restructure public education. This restructuring movement generally is being spearheaded from within: from teachers, parents, administrators, and community people pressuring for better, more responsive public schools. This movement has its roots in the community control movement, the restructuring schools movement, and the school-based management movement. It has created a demand for innovative and diverse schools, arguing that there isn't just one model but multiple models that serve children, and that we need a much greater

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degree of diversity in what public schools offer.

Another group that often supports charter schools is based in what I call the "establishment center" of the education reform debate. These are the folks, some in business and some community people, who are genuinely concerned about the state of public education but who tend to have a narrow view of what they want to achieve. They tend to be not so much concerned with improving the entire system — which means to bring up the bottom, where the real crisis is — but with further improving education at the top. Charter schools appeal to such people because they are a way to create elite options within the public school, such as selective high schools or magnet schools, which often function as a way to further track and sort students in a way that the

themselves with marketplaces forces. They may be uneasy about the alliance, but figure they will be able to use the conservatives to help get some innovation accomplished. The question often becomes, however: who is using whom?

How do you evaluate what's a good charter school?

You have to look at the specific proposal. It's not enough to be for or against charter schools based on some abstract principles. In fact, the more abstract the debate, the more it becomes an ideological battle rather than a debate on education.

I use eight principles to evaluate any charter school plan. The first principle is whether a particular charter school strengthens or weakens public education as a whole. Does the charter school put as

licensed teachers, and so forth — also apply to the charter school?

Such an approach also leads to the second principle, whether the charters are models that can be replicated or whether they are so unique that other schools have little to learn from them. Clearly, our goal should be to strengthen the system as a whole and create innovation within the system, not set up an outside structure that has little effect on the system.

I also believe very firmly in a third principle: that the charter school has to be considered a public school and therefore must be nonsectarian.

A fourth principle is whether the charter school is truly innovative and whether the charter meets an educational need that's not already being met by an existing public school. For example, New York City has just launched its New Visions High Schools. These are public schools that are semi-autonomous with strong school-based management, and that work in partnership with existing civic and community institutions. There are New Visions high schools developed in partnership with museums, parent organizations, even the health care union. There are many other examples of innovative schools that function within the framework of public schools and which have not required special charter school legislation. These include the charter school movement in Philadelphia, the Comer schools, and the schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools. What these efforts have in common is that the schools did not opt out of the system and, in fact, are working as models to strengthen the system.

What you need is a bottom-up assessment by parents, teachers, and community members of what they need, of what exists that already works, and what needs to be developed. If you want to call that a charter school, fine. The bottom line is that there needs to be a process within the community that involves parents and teachers. That's a different process than what seems to be happening in many places.

Therefore, a fifth principle is that charter schools must be accountable to the public. One of the inherent features in most charter schools is that they are less

It's not enough to be for or against charter schools based on some abstract principles. You have to look at the specific proposal.

so-called "best and the brightest" get special treatment.

There is a third group that supports charter schools, which is the conservative and Far Right wing of the education debate. They have a very different agenda from the other two. These are the folks who would prefer to have vouchers and to privatize the system. But since they haven't been winning on that issue, they are turning to charters as a way to create quasi-voucher schools that will compete for tuition dollars and will escape regulation. Their version of charters is based on the marketplace; they want to increase the amount of schooling that is beholden to the marketplace, not to local democratic control and accountability.

Politics makes strange bed fellows, and people with different agendas may unite around a common charter school proposal. For example, those interested in restructuring and innovation within public schools may decide to tactically align

much back into the public system as it takes out, in terms of resources, money, energy, attention from central office, selection of students, the kind of exceptions that are made for the charter school but not other schools, and so forth? Does the charter not only create a decent school but do so in a way that helps other schools? Is it an exclusive island separated from the rest of the system, rewarding only the privileged or the lucky, or is it a beachhead for improving all schools?

The heart of this principle is establishing that the charter school cannot be a stealth mechanism for a new kind of elitism. This then becomes a framework for more specific questions such as: Does the charter school have open admissions? Are there nondiscrimination protections around creed, language, race, gender, academic achievement, and so forth? Does whatever applies to the public school system — in terms of dealing with the needs of special students, or bilingual students,

regulated. While this may help them be more innovative, it can also lead to unclear accountability, both financial and academic. Accountability is an important aspect of the structure of a public education system. Schools are paid for by tax dollars and are meant to be accountable not only to the students, parents, and teachers at a school, but to the broader community and to future generations of students. The tax dollars that pay for schools don't belong to just one child or one parent but to the entire community. It is absolutely essential that charters be set up within this context.

A related, sixth principle is that charters should be governed by the local school board and not some outside authority such as the legislature or state department of education. Otherwise you lose that accountability to the community. Further, you have to think about the parents who are sending their kids to the charter school. If the schools are not governed by the local board, where do the parents go if they have a problem? As we all know, public schools are not paragons of democracy. At the same time, the local school board does provide a channel for problems and complaints. If a charter school is not subject to a process of open meetings and public information and is not under the jurisdiction of the local board, where do parents turn if, for example, their child is expelled? Would they have to file a 200-page brief to the complaints department of the state Department of Education and wait six years to get a ruling?

Principle seven is that in certain key areas, charters need to be treated the same as other public schools. They should get equal funding, not more or less. Teachers should be licensed. And the employees should have the same rights as employees in other public schools. Charters have to allow for collective bargaining, even if it means changes in existing contracts.

There's a final principle. We know so little about how charter schools work, and few seem to be set up with sufficient sensitivity to the principles I have mentioned. Therefore, I believe charters should only be introduced as pilots at this point. We need to see how this all plays out a bit,

especially what impact charters have on the viability and improvement of neighborhood schools.

If you require teachers to be licensed, doesn't that unnecessarily restrict the pool of potentially good teachers, in particular teachers of color?

People have a right to be skeptical about the way that credentialing creates barriers. The solution is not to get rid of licensing and teacher standards, but to attack the barriers and open up the profession.

I think we need to address alternative routes to licensing. There are many people in the community who are natural teachers and role models. There needs to be a new career path for teaching that allows them to come into the profession and to use past experience to get licensed. We need to ensure that such people have a chance to get certified and licensed, whether by alternative certification, or subsidized tuition for higher education, or a subsidized career ladder based on in-school service.

The important thing is to bring people in with some accompanying process of training and support to do their jobs well.

If kids learn, what's the difference if it's a charter school, or a for-profit school, or a public school? Isn't a good education the bottom line?

In the short term, for a small group of children, it may not make a difference. But in the long run, and for all the children that the system needs to serve, it might make a profound difference.

One of the things about public schools, whether or not they complete this mission, is that they are expected to serve all students. One danger with charters is that they will become elite islands. There are those who will seek to control admissions and cream students — and that can be done informally as well as formally. You



Credit: Susan Lina Ruggles

can have a great nondiscrimination clause and a wonderful open admissions statement on paper, but there are many subtle and not so subtle ways that children get selected — whether it's who gets the information, who is retained, what culture the school speaks to, how much the school is able to integrate with the needs of families and communities, and so forth.

There is an ever-present pressure within our public schools to create islands for elites, and not only on the basis of color but for the middle class in general. If charters become another form of a magnet that attracts those who already have some advantages and then gives them special resources, we are not solving the problem. This is one reason it's so important we create charters that strengthen the system as a whole.

Some of the most visible backers of the charter school movement have been for-profit school management firms, like the Edison Project and EAI, that say they oppose tracking, favor open admissions, and promote child-centered learning. Shouldn't they get a chance at moving the charter school reform agenda?

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Well, as of 1996, they've really blown their chances. The Edison Project initially proposed to create a thousand of its own for-profit schools and then scaled back to become a private management firm for public schools. It is now a very minor player in scattered districts and is in very shaky fiscal conditions, with projections of losing another \$6.7 million this year. EAI, after grabbing headlines for gaining management contracts in Baltimore, Dade County and the entire Hartford system, has now had these contracts terminated. Not only did the EAI managed schools show no significant educational gains, but serious questions about the integrity of EAI evaluation and reporting practices were raised.

These ventures probably won't close the book on for-profit charter schools, but they surely point out valuable lessons. One is that we have a right to be skeptical about good intentions, when the bottom line is profitability not education. These two educational entrepreneurs, and a third called APS, have attracted high-profile educators and contracts, but they have not been able to stay the course. They often promise to bring new resources to a school district, but in practice, they are front-loading their programs with technology, new teachers, a fresh coat of paint. They have diverted resources from other public school programs, and from their investors. But they have not made schools work better over time, nor helped other schools improve, nor taken on the challenge of system-wide change, nor contributed to solving the enormous problems of school finance.

Of course, I am doubly skeptical about for-profit charters because I feel there is a hidden agenda as well. Edison and EAI have been trying to establish their model schools as a way to accelerate privatization trends in public education. In business parlance, they have been trying to establish a market share. Their interest in taking over low-income districts has not stemmed from equity concerns, but from the opportunity to use distressed schools as market entry points. Sort of like Toyota building its business in the U.S. twenty years ago with the smallest, cheapest cars.

However, private education firms will

never really succeed unless they reach much greater economies of scale, a much bigger chunk of the school market. So they become forces, though now rather tarnished, for increasing the contracting out of educational functions to private firms and ultimately, for vouchers. The Edison Project's most prominent backer, Bush's Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, has been very explicit about tying this work to a voucher agenda.

But even if Edison and EAI were sincere in their concern for equity and school restructuring, and even if they had better track records, you would still have to ask why you need the profit motive to reach your goal. There are many ways to implement good schools without using a profit incentive. It's already happening in scores of urban districts, because teachers and parents have dedicated themselves to the *child incentive*. Reform-minded folks should be asking their administrators or school boards, why should our district pay a profit premium to do what others are doing under a public system?

But Edison seems willing to put extra money into the system, for example by promising to put a computer in every student's home. Why would a district turn down such an infusion of resources?

If the only way Edison can succeed is by tripling the resources available and using private sources to bolster their finances, then they are not building a model that can be replicated by other schools. You can be sure they would not make those resources available 200-300 times over for the other schools in a system, unless of course they cut money elsewhere, such as on wages and staff-to-student ratios.

If Edison shows that a school can work if it is bombarded with resources and new



Credit: Cleo Freelance Photo

technology, then the issue becomes how to ensure such funding for all schools. That's a far better route than becoming brokers with the private sector, so that profit-making concerns can claim that only private business holds the solution to education.

The only way a for-profit model will work is if they succeed in privatizing large chunks of public education, which would have disastrous consequences for public education. For-profit companies need more than a handful of schools, although for the moment they are concentrating on building models of privatization as a way to argue that the whole system should be privatized. In business parlance, it's called establishing your market share.

Ultimately, these for-profit model schools are a backdoor approach to privatization. They are not grappling with the fundamental problem of financing. It may lead to a few good schools in the short run, and it is certainly a temptation. But what about the other schools? And who is calling the shots, the district or the company? District officials may be very cocky, thinking they are using these companies. But I fear that one day they will find that they got used instead.

Charter schools also promise to cut through the enormous amount of red tape and bureaucracy afflicting public schools. Isn't that good?

Bureaucracy — whether it's administrative bureaucracy or union bureaucracy — is a real blight on public education. It drains away resources and saps peoples' energy for change. The charter concept has helped focus attention on the need to reduce bureaucratic regulation and create new spaces for innovation. Charters also focus on the need for school site decision-making. Of course, a lot of other models of school restructuring within the public school system also change the rules and support school-based decision-making — look at the sweeping local council reforms in Chicago. So charters shouldn't be seen as the only approach to fighting red tape.

The danger is that parts of the charter movement want total deregulation — a pure free market for education. Their version of charters would bypass local school boards, basic standards of school performance, and rights to public oversight.

Will the dragon they slay be the bureaucracy or community accountability? Will their kind of deregulation shake up the teachers union or just let charter school managers replace teacher aides and cafeteria workers from the community with a low-wage contract labor force? Will their kind of charter deflate district bureaucracies or just create a new layer of charter-issuing bureaucrats at the more distant state level?

The real question here, and in the whole debate about charter schools, is: What kind of charter are you getting? Parents, teachers, and concerned people in the community should look beyond the slogans to examine exactly what form of charter is being proposed, starting with the question: Will this kind of charter help to improve all the schools in our system?

Unions often block innovations that might improve public schools, for example by enforcing strict work rules or inflexible seniority plans. If charter schools help get around union regulations, isn't that good?

I think it's a mistake to see unions as the only obstacle to change. There are two other equally important obstacles that don't get dealt with as viscerally. One is the enormous amount of administrative bureaucracy. In California, for example, the state and local regulations are bigger than the Manhattan phone book.

The second critical problem is money. And charter schools do absolutely nothing to address the very real and pressing issue of increasing resources to urban schools, where the cry for charter schools tends to be the loudest. Because charter schools don't even pretend to resolve the problem of inequitable resources among schools, one should not have any false hopes that charters will shift the entire terrain of education.

As far as unions go, there is no question that they are having to adjust to a new climate of school reform. Almost any attempt to restructure local schools can

ing. And some are engaged in classical stonewalling that has brought reform efforts to a very frustrating impasse — they need to be taken on.

But my view is that union issues, the need for the unions to change, must be dealt with directly, the way all institutions change: through challenging, organizing and educating. Charter schools, school-based management, or any innovation may be the terrain of these struggles, but the programs should also stand on their merits. Unrestricted charters — or charters that are used as another form of tracking and segregation or privatization — can't be justified just because they shake up the union.

In fact, pushing any reforms on teachers from the top-down only deepens union entrenchment and defensiveness. It also may lead to a lousy school. I would think, for example, that those reforming education would want teachers to have academ-

There is no question that unions are having to adjust to a new climate of school reform. Almost any attempt to restructure local schools can challenge how a union traditionally functions.

challenge how a union traditionally functions. Some unions are responding to this new climate and are looking at how to be advocates for education reform. For instance, the NEA's two reform think-tanks, the Center for the Preservation of Public Education and the Center for Innovation, have started a five-year charter schools initiative. They are working with teachers in six states to assist members in starting charters themselves; they are also helping members distinguish between progressive and regressive charter models. The UFT in New York City has surprised a lot of people by supporting the widespread creation of alternative public schools, which are very akin to charters.

Of course, a lot of teacher union locals are not there. Some are still in denial that it's a new ballgame and they need to wake up. Many are in a confusing period of transition and they need supportive nudg-

ic freedom, to be decently paid, to have planning time — protections offered by a union.

If you want to deal with the problem of seniority, deal with it straight on. If you do so by completely deregulating schools, that leaves schools unaccountable. So you're just solving one problem by creating one that's potentially worse.

My advice to the administration is that if you allow teachers to become involved in the process of change, that will create internal pressure on the union to be more flexible. But you have to involve teachers, not alienate and scapegoat them for all the problems of education. The most effective way to change a union is to make change happen among its members. ■

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Charters: Finding the Courage To Face Our Contradictions

By Eric Rofes

Between workshops at a statewide charter school conference, a woman pulled me aside in the hallway and backed me into an alcove. "I know who you are," she whispered. "I've read the books you wrote with your open classroom students. What are you doing at a charter school conference?" I explained that I was a graduate student researching charter schools and dispelled her notion that I was a spy for a radical teachers' organization. She then confessed her progressive credentials: teacher's union activist, environmentalist, anti-racist organizer. She said she was attending the conference because, after many frustrating years in inner city schools, she was part of a small group of

differences in charter policies and school development in the 20 states which have approved charter legislation. One central feature is the charter — a written contract between school organizers and some sponsoring agency such as a local school board, state board of education, or public university — which is expected to capture the school's spirit and philosophy. School organizers are commonly teachers or parents, but, depending on the state, may also be an existing school, non-profit organization, or for-profit firm. Charter schools have been created around specific philosophies and methods (Montessori, Accelerated Schools, or Coalition of Essential Schools), populations (such as high school drop-outs), and underserved communities (Native Americans, hearing-impaired

middle, and high schools, and several combinations of these levels. In most states, they appear roughly to be split between urban, rural, and suburban. The first charter school law passed in Minnesota in 1991. Since then, almost 250 charter schools have opened across the country, the majority in California and Arizona.

Confusion and Doubts

As I've traveled around the nation, one thing has become clear: I am not the only educator interested or involved in charter schools who defines himself or herself as "progressive." And I am not the only one grappling with confusion and doubts.

We cannot deny that charter schools have been championed in parts of the country by the Right and linked to voucher initiatives, reduced funding for public education, and the hiring of private for-profit firms to manage public schools.

Yet the actual social, cultural, and political life of charter schools is complex, textured, and resistant to narrow categorization.

The "charter school movement" — a nebulous collection of individuals and unaffiliated organizations advocating for charter legislation — is not comprised entirely of conservatives and doesn't march in lock-step order. Political supporters cross party lines and charters have been supported frequently by legislators in liberal, progressive, or moderate districts. While free-market, neoconservative think tanks have attained impressive visibility in the drive for charter schools, many of the movement's key educational practitioners, academics, and theorists are distinctly left of center.

What seems to unite charter advocates is a desire for greater parental and community control of schools, a resistance to bureaucratization of public education, and the expansion of school choice beyond the affluent. In some inner cities, charter schools have garnered tremendous neighborhood involvement and appear to have

Progressive educators should become involved in the charter school movement and help use it to further school reforms based on innovation and equity.

teachers thinking about founding a charter school. Why was she sneaking around, whispering in alcoves? "This conference is dominated by conservatives," she said. "If they knew what I stood for, I'd be outta here in no time flat."

As part of my multi-year study of charter schools in five states I have visited over two dozen schools, met with school founders, and observed many classrooms. I have attended public hearings and statewide conferences, interviewed union activists and leadership, and talked with federal policy-makers who fund charter school initiatives. Perhaps most important, I am an educator committed to multiculturalism, equity, and public education.

It is difficult to discuss charter schools as a single entity because there are vast

students, or Central American refugees). Reports have suggested that charters are evenly split between a traditional academic approach ("back-to-basics" or "college prep") and more innovative approaches such as integrated curriculum or interdisciplinary approaches.

Charters Are Public Schools

Charter schools are generally funded by the state on a per pupil basis. They are not private schools; they are public schools freed from many local and state regulations in exchange for meeting what are essentially educational productivity levels inscribed in the charter. Some states allow charter schools to hire non-union, non-certified teachers. In two states, private schools may apply for charter school status. Charter schools include primary,

been a source of revitalized community participation in local schools. And many progressive educators insist that charters provide their first opportunities — after years of frustrated attempts within school systems — to imagine, design, and craft educational programs of integrity and vision.

The overwhelming majority of state charter policies make considerable effort to ensure that charter schools cannot select students based on previous academic work, test scores, or interview processes. All charter schools are schools of choice, and most oversubscribed schools are required to select their students through a lottery process. In most states, teachers unions can be credited with forcing policy-makers to craft charter legislation which deters "creaming," or providing preferential admissions to academically talented students.

Issues For Progressives

As more states pass charter school legislation and the number of schools increases, it may be worthwhile for progressive educators to not only pose serious questions, but to jump on the charter school bandwagon and use the freedom from regulation to create innovative centers of learning for public school children. It might be time for progressive educators working with charter schools to come together, confront these contradictions, and find a collective voice.

Progressive teachers, parents, and charter school founders are often asked: Don't you care about the future of public education? How can you drain finances from already impoverished public school systems? Why are you supporting the creation of a sector which takes the "best" students out of the system? Are you trying to demean the teaching profession by supporting schools which, in some states, may hire uncredentialed teachers and offer little job security?

Progressive parents and educators often have difficulty answering these questions. We've seen too many school reform initiatives come and go, relegated to the junk heap of great ideas that turned out to be little more than fads. Furthermore, these challenges tap into deep and complex issues about which we sincerely care.

While Minnesota and California point to a few inner-city charter schools serving poor communities of color, at this stage in the movement there are few examples of charter schools successfully integrating previously segregated communities. Like most public schools, charters appear to be either overwhelmingly white or overwhelmingly of color.

Other questions nag at progressive educators in charter schools: If charter schools are schools of choice, will they disproportionately serve families motivated to ask questions, seek alternatives, and make application—activities historically correlated for reasons of time, resources, and educational background, with class status? If the dramatic increase in states approving charter legislation continues, and if most of these states do not require charter school teachers to be certified or be a part of the union, what impact will this have on the viability of teachers unions and the profession of teaching? Are some charter schools creating school cultures which discourage poor and working-class families from participating? For example, California charter schools are not required to provide transportation to and from school or offer lunch programs. Some require parents to sign contracts promising a certain number of volunteer work hours in the school each semester — a feature which might serve as a quiet barrier to full participation by all families.

A Modest Proposal

There are several questions surrounding charter schools that I think are particularly important at this stage of the movement. Among the issues that progressive charter school advocates might want to focus on in the near future are:

1. Finding ways to avoid the polarization which has emerged in several states (such as Massachusetts and California) between teacher unions and charter school advocates. We know it is possible for charter school movements to maintain policies which offer opportunities for free-



Credit: Susan Lina Rugles

dom from regulation and yet still be responsive to union concerns about job security and educational equity.

2. Ensuring the accountability of charter schools to qualified public bodies. In several states, regulations do not thoroughly spell out methods for the evaluation of schools. This presents opportunities for using student and school assessments which approach the child and the organization holistically, and which broadly define what is meant by success.

3. Addressing complex yet critically important questions about funding. In many states, charter schools are expected to engage in private fundraising. What kinds of partnerships might link charters in affluent communities with those in poor neighborhoods? Locating and acquiring a school site has emerged as one of the top challenges for school founders. What role should state and local governments play in helping charter schools overcome this challenge?

It should surprise no one that educators committed to progressive values are drawn to charter school efforts. It behooves us to try to make sure that the charter school movement furthers progressive educational aims. ■

Eric Rofes is a doctoral student in social and cultural studies at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education.

Jingletown: One Charter School's Story

By Tamara Prévost and
Margarita Jiménez-Silva

In terms of evaluating the progressive nature of any school, perhaps the most important questions to ask are: who does the school serve and what type of education is taking place?

We teach at Jingletown, a charter junior high school in Oakland, Calif. When the school was created, there were several priorities expressed in its charter, including: smaller classroom size; two-hour blocks for core subject periods; bilingual and multicultural instruction; cooperative learning; and a diverse and representative teaching staff. The majority of teachers have been Latino and bilingual, and many have come from progressive educational or activist backgrounds. Although we have been short on resources, we have stood firm in our commitment to classes no larger than 24. We have been able to do this by sacrificing a janitor, alarm system, and other such "luxuries." Students, teachers, and parents are responsible for keeping the school clean. Although we receive the same per pupil funding as do Oakland public schools, we have expenditures which regular schools don't have, such as paying rent for our school site.

Jingletown grew out of the organizational efforts of Latino parents and a committed principal to create a safe and positive learning environment for their children. We went to teach at the school because we were excited about doing bilingual education in a school which valued Chicano culture and academic instruction in Spanish. In spite of state-mandated bilingual education programs for limited English proficient students in California, most Californian schools have few bilingual teachers and are not ideologically committed to promoting academic excellence and proficiency in students' native language as well as in English. Far too often, bilingual educational



Credit: Fernando Mereses

A student at the Jingletown charter school.

programs actually have fewer resources, less qualified teachers, segregated classrooms and a watered-down curriculum. In spite of *Lau v Nichols*, only one-third of language minority students in California are in an educational program which attempts to address their language needs. We saw teaching at Jingletown as an opportunity to teach in a public school and respond to the needs of working-class Latino students traditionally underserved by the public school system.

Parents Organize

Clementina Durón, the principal of Jingletown, said the impetus behind organizing for Jingletown came from parents at Lazear Elementary School who were satisfied with the bilingual education at Lazear and with the school's environment that respected their culture. However, the parents became alarmed when looking at the neighborhood junior highs, which were seen as large impersonal schools with violence, gangs, and the prospect of academic failure of their children. The parents, with the support of Lazear teach-

ers, took advantage of California's charter legislation and formed Jingletown. (Jingletown gets its name from the East Oakland neighborhood where most of the families are from. There are various theories about the name's origin, such as the story which recalls the time when the neighborhood was home to mostly Portuguese immigrants, who would stand on street corners and jingle their silver coins in their pockets, after being paid for their work in the neighborhood factories.)

Jingletown is a public school and has been organized as a non-profit organization with its own board of directors. The majority of Jingletown board members are parents with children at the school but there also are students, teachers, and members from the broader Oakland community. The Oakland School Board granted the charter; it holds the power to continue or revoke the charter. We are now in our third year of operation, and have 172 students in the seventh through ninth grade. The majority are Latino while the other 10% are a mixture of Native American and African American students.

Parent involvement, another fundamental component of the charter, is seen in their majority representation on the school board, where all meetings are conducted in Spanish or bilingually. Parents also agree to do four volunteer hours a month. Some parents are extremely dedicated to the school and log over many hours of service a month. In reality, many parents have not complied with this part of the school contract and there has been no real consequence yet, but parents on the board have formed a committee to deal with this issue. And in spite of the serious hardships that parents and students have undergone in the creation of the school, such as the fact that we had no electricity for the first two months of this school year because of our move to a new location, families vigorously defend the charter school and express that it fulfills an educational need not being met by other public schools. Most often, students and parents differentiate Jinglestown from the other public schools because they say it is safer, there is less conflict and that it is more demanding, both academically and in terms of discipline. As one student wrote in a journal last week, "Yo creo y es cierto que estoy aprendiendo mucho en esta escuela aunque sea pobre pero es honrada y no hay tantos problemas." (Ana Martinez, 8th grader)

Much of the politics of the school end up being negotiated issue by issue rather than following some predetermined position. For example, the Oakland teachers strike presented us with a real dilemma. On the one hand, there were many longtime teacher union members on our staff, and we wanted to support the legitimate issues concerning striking teachers. (The strike centered on demands for lower class size and salary increases.) On the other hand, we reasoned that we were teaching under conditions that were quite different than those of other Oakland School District teachers: we have in fact achieved smaller classroom size and there is real teacher participation in school decision-making. Some teachers expressed mixed feelings about the teachers union itself, especially when bread and butter issues of teachers take priority over interests of the broader community and the students themselves.

We also weighed the fact that we had

already disadvantaged our families by starting the school year two weeks late. Finally, we feared that striking would seriously injure our very limited resource base: a strike might mean closing the school for good. Our move this year to a new location had cost the school three times what we had predicted. Ultimately, we decided not to strike ourselves but to write a letter of support to striking teachers, explaining the reasoning behind our decision. However, it is clear that our position on the

grant from a research institute which we later discovered was against bilingual education and supported a back-to-basics emphasis for educational reform. This issue was discussed among educators and board members, and we accepted the money. Refusing "tainted" monies is much easier when you don't have 172 kids whose education is suffering because they don't have access to basic resources. We did decide, however, not to accept further contributions from this foundation if they

Although we are excited about creating a school which provides an outstanding education, we are concerned about the role charters will play in strengthening or weakening of public education.

teachers union is an unsettled issue, both in terms of our theory and our practice. If we support the teachers' union in theory but never do anything about it in real practice, what will that mean for the relationship between the union and charter schools in the long run?

When to take money?

The discussion over our relationship with the teachers' union mirrors discussions over who to take money from and under what conditions. There are no easy answers. In general, we feel extremely deprived of resources. We have no computers, no sinks for biology projects, little physical education equipment, small portable classrooms — and the list goes on. However, despite talk of business interest in reforming education, there has been no rush by business to take us over or to shower us with resources. On a theoretical level, many of us agree that the best thing that businesses and corporations could do for public schools would be to pay more taxes to public education so that educators and the school community could then decide what to do with the money.

However, there have been real concerns over whether accepting donations from certain institutions and private enterprises will jeopardize our school's autonomy. For example, we received a small

did not support our bilingual/multicultural educational priorities.

Although we are excited about creating a school which provides an outstanding education for our students, we are concerned about the role charter schools will play in the strengthening or weakening of public education in general. There is a real need for those with the information and the resources to help communities with the least resources to demand terrific public schools which respond to their needs and interests. Creating public charter schools can be one way of doing this. However, although many charter schools may ascribe to "progressive" pedagogies, most in California are not in urban areas serving economically poor students. In fact, it appears that many of the neighborhoods that already have decent schools also have the most resources to put into the creation of a charter school. If this trend continues, then charter school reform will not end up better serving those most in need but will simply provide alternative schools for "rich" kids. It is yet to be seen whether serving those most in need or good schools is the charter school rule, or rather, the exception. ■

The authors work at the Jinglestown charter school.

Total Decentralization: Too Much of a Good Thing?

By Bob Peterson

For eight years, the Site-Based Council at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee has debated everything from spelling to discipline to choosing a principal. We have battled central office some years and supported its initiatives in others. We have lobbied the city's Common Council to get a new playground and worked with community groups on after-school programs. We strongly support site-based management and decentralized decision-making.

Because I have served for all eight years as a teacher member of Fratney's council,

our neighborhood.

But my experience has also taught me that successful school reform should not focus primarily on reducing mandates and easing contractual obligations. The focus must be on the more difficult work of changing classroom life — curriculum, quality of teaching, assessment, resources for students, and the nature of the student/teacher relationship. These classroom issues, in turn, are related to school-wide concerns such as a common vision, substantive parental and community involvement, and time not only for reflection on how to improve the school, but

dismantle social programs and progressive reforms won through the struggles of the 1960s, some proposals calling for total school decentralization are part of a politically backward agenda that would undercut equity. One need only look at the debate over the federal school lunch program to see that arguments for local control can be used for backward political purposes.

What Is Decentralization?

Decentralization means different things in different districts. But almost all decentralization plans share the view that at least some budgetary and policy decision-making powers should be transferred to the school level. How much power is transferred, and to whom, are the key questions.

Sometimes power is transferred to the principal, a reform that skeptics dub "principal-based management." Sometimes the power is transferred to site-based councils of staff, parents, and community members. Usually the councils are dominated by staff. Sometimes, but rarely, they are dominated by parents.

The amount of power transferred also varies. It ranges from almost meaningless authority, like being able to spend tiny amounts of discretionary funds, to more substantive powers such as in Chicago, where the parent-dominated councils can hire and fire principals.

I believe that site-based management works best when power resides in an elected council of staff, parents, and community people. But the work of even the best of councils can be hindered if responsibilities are overly broad. If site-based councils are forced to deal with all the administrative details of schooling — from choosing a recycling company, to hiring someone to run the cafeteria, to contracting out snow removal, to negotiating employee benefits and wages — there is precious little time to deal with more important academic issues.

I believe it is essential that progressive educators distinguish their call for site-based management from the demagogic rhetoric of conservatives who criticize governmental regulations as an infringement on freedom.

I am all the more concerned by trends in some proposals that take decentralization to an extreme — and that play into the hands of those who want to privatize education and those who, under the guise of deregulation, would gut hard-won reforms that have made education more equitable for the historically disadvantaged.

Fratney's Experience

Let me state clearly: I support many decentralization proposals and I understand problems of bureaucracy. Our school, which is based on a philosophy of multiculturalism and two-way bilingual teaching under which all students learn in Spanish and English, was born out of a community struggle with the central administration. It would not exist if it weren't for the grass-roots effort of parents, community activists, and teachers who demanded a program serving the needs of

time to develop new initiatives and approaches to teaching.

Unfortunately, this difficult and at times expensive approach to true school reform does not sit well with legislators who want quick fixes.

I'm not defending all contract provisions or educational regulations. Some, such as blanket seniority provisions or overly specific state regulations on minutes and days of student/teacher contact, clearly hinder reform. But the growing tendency to view union contracts or regulations per se as the source of our education woes is simplistic.

I believe it is essential that progressive educators distinguish their call for site-based management from the demagogic rhetoric of conservatives who criticize governmental regulations as an infringement on freedom. Just as Republicans on the federal level are using such rhetoric to

What I consider extreme decentralization goes under several titles. Sometimes it is called "school-based budgeting," or "contracting out," or "devolution." It was instituted *en masse* in England in 1988 under the conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and has been growing in popularity in parts of Canada and the United States.

Proponents of total decentralization argue that schools are subjected to unnecessary rules, mandates, and contract obligations. They also argue that those closest to the delivery of services are best

able to allocate resources and ensure accountability. By allowing schools to control their entire budgets and to "buy" their services from Central Office or from private contractors, the argument goes, there will be increased competition that will force Central Office to be more efficient.

Total decentralization is usually linked to a market approach to education. Paul Hill, a consultant from RAND who is the leading decentralization consultant for the Milwaukee Public Schools administration, describes his proposal for contracting as similar to a "a market system."

Writing in his report *Reinventing Public Education*, Hill notes that under his market approach "students and teachers would choose and be chosen by schools; no one would have an automatic right to administer, teach in, or attend a particular school." Private businesses, including for-profit corporations such as Educational Alternatives, Inc. and the Edison Project, play a major role in Hill's vision.

In more extreme scenarios, for example in Lewis J. Perelman's *School's Out*, all schools would cease to exist. They would

continued on page 56

THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS SHOULD BE **PRIVATIZED** AND RUN WITH THE **FREE-MARKET EFFICIENCY** OF OUR **MAJOR CORPORATIONS**...WHICH LEADS US TO WONDER: WOULD THIS MEAN THAT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS COULD REWARD THEMSELVES WITH **MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR BONUSES** REGARDLESS OF PERFORMANCE?

--AND SO, I'M PROUD TO PRESENT THE **TWO GRADUATING MEMBERS** OF THE CLASS OF '93...



IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE PROFITS, WOULD THE WASTEFUL EXTRAVAGANCE OF **LIVE TEACHERS** BE ELIMINATED--IN FAVOR OF A MORE COST-EFFICIENT **AUTOMATED INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD**?

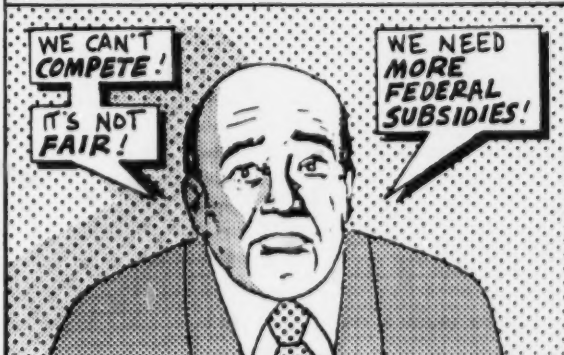


WOULD CORPORATE RAIDERS TAKE OVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN **LEVERAGED BUYOUTS**--AND THEN SELL OFF THE SCHOOLS' **ASSETS** TO PAY OFF THE DEBTS INCURRED?

GOOD NEWS--WE JUST SOLD THE FIFTH GRADE CLASS TO **BECHTEL**!



AND...WOULD THESE PRIVATIZED FREE-MARKET SCHOOLS RESPOND TO INEVITABLE FOREIGN COMPETITION IN THE TRADITIONAL MANNER OF AMERICAN BUSINESS...BY **WHINING** AND **BEGGING** FOR GOVERNMENT **HANDOUTS**?



Credit: Tom Tomorrow Dan Perkins

be replaced by a system of "microvouchers" under which students would be individually educated through a privatized system of computer networks and technological paraphernalia. Perelman views privatization as the central reform facing education. As he notes on page 314 of his book, "The time has come to make privatization the primary goal of restructuring education and training."

Teacher Oversight

Hill summarizes a common view that teachers are given "a quite detailed picture of what they must and must not do in the classroom. Though teachers are nominally free to devise and select their own methods, all operate under similar, and heavy, constraints."

This sounds plausible in theory. But in most schools, teachers have great leeway once the classroom door is closed. As long as the class is "under control" and there are no parent complaints, most principals are satisfied. In fact, a central problem is that there is too little quality supervision of classroom life. Too many mediocre teachers continue teaching the same boring material to the same bored students.

To the degree teachers are actually forced to follow questionable instructional practices, such as basal reading programs and test-preparation schemes, it usually has little to do with the union contracts or state regulations that some decentralization proponents seek to abolish. In fact, one could envision an increase in such test-prep curricula under a completely decentralized system. Principals might be so concerned with the need to recruit students in the competitive marketplace that they mandate practices that might raise short-term indicators of success but negatively affect long-range academic achievement.

Time for What?

A key indicator of school success is the degree to which staff and parents have time for reflecting, discussing, and planning around educational issues. At Fratney, as in most elementary schools, there

is precious little time for such reflection. Total decentralization would only exacerbate this problem because of the additional non-educational responsibilities. For example, if a school is in charge of contracting out for its trash removal and its food and maintenance operations, valuable time will be consumed which might

improvement, or adequately deal with discipline. To give more responsibilities to principals when many are unable to successfully complete their current ones seems to be a curious strategy for improving the schools.

Common Vision

Another lesson we have learned at Fratney is the importance of a common vision — a belief shared by other successful public elementary schools in Milwaukee. This not-so-surprising characteristic of a good school is echoed in Hill's writings. But I fear that Hill is overly concerned with linking the need for a common vision with his broader goal of privatization.

Hill argues that under his approach, the state "could not ... specify curriculum so tightly that contractors were forced into the box confining today's public schools, i.e. essentially required to run identical instructional programs."

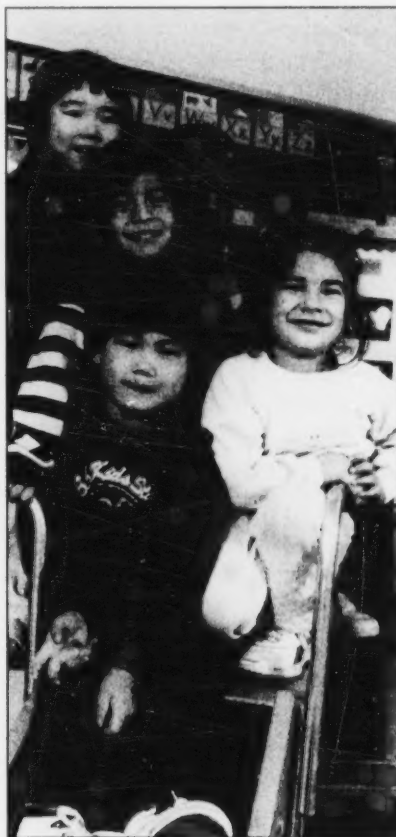
Wait a minute. Are schools currently forced to run "identical instructional programs?" No. And are schools with their own vision possible only under a system of total decentralization? No. Indeed, under the allegedly "monolithic public school system" in Milwaukee, we have had an incredibly broad array of special-focus schools developed over the last two decades, including Montessori, open-education, language immersion, African-American immersion, creative arts, environmental, and Waldorf schools.

More Resources

Our Fratney experience has taught us the importance of adequate resources. Due to the historic underfunding of urban school systems, we suffer from a standard facility that lacks an art room, music room, stage, lunch room, kitchen, and adequate number of electrical outlets. We lack the money to reduce class size or provide for adequate technology in the classrooms.

What would extreme decentralization do to answer the question of resources? Precious little. Further, in some areas decentralization is offered as a "cost-neutral" reform and implicitly counterposed to moves for adequate funding of schools.

To be sure, there are districts where too much money sits in the Central Adminis-



Credit: Rick Reinhard

be better spent discussing education. Do we really want principals and/or site-based councils to spend numerous hours reviewing different bids, negotiating with and selecting contractors, ensuring the work is carried out according to contract, and intervening when work is not done properly?

Decentralization proponents argue that principals should become quasi-CEOs and manage all the finances of the school. Yet currently, principals don't have enough time to visit classrooms, evaluate staff, provide leadership for special programs, develop curriculum, assist staff in need of

tration. But this is hardly the case in Milwaukee. Too often, brazen examples of bureaucracy are generalized as if they occur in all public school districts.

Interestingly, proponents of extreme decentralization fail to talk about the financial implications when one abandons economy of scale in purchasing — although proponents of privatization are quick to bring up economies of scale when trying to rationalize national for-profit endeavors such as the Edison Project.

Controlling Personnel

One rationale given for complete school-based budgeting is that it will allow building principals to better control personnel. Admittedly, this is a very important area. And in some cases, lack of school-based control of personnel has led to significant problems. But some advocates of total decentralization are seizing on personnel problems as an excuse to hire non-union labor. A more socially responsible approach would be to change the labor contract so that it better meets the needs of the students and school — as has happened in a number of districts.

The central concern in personnel matters is the teaching staff. Here, advocates of total decentralization carry matters to the extreme. Hill, for instance, recommends that schools "negotiate wage and benefit packages with each individual teacher or administrator." Chester Finn, currently a fellow at the Indianapolis-based Hudson Institute and a former education official in the Bush administration, takes a similar view in his book *We Must Take Charge*.

The Social Cost

Proponents of decentralization argue that because schools won't have to "buy" their services from the "public monopoly," prices will be competitive and money will be saved. Whose money will be saved? And at what social cost? In Baltimore, the for-profit company Education Alternatives, Inc. replaced unionized teaching assistants, who were predominantly people of color from the community, with lower-paid, mostly white college students who had few ties to the community. Yes, money was saved, but at a cost to workers who were among the most poorly paid in

the system and who were the parents of children in the system.

The issue is further complicated because public employment is one of the few remaining areas of family-sustaining jobs for many minorities, who were disproportionately affected by the loss of unionized manufacturing jobs in the 1970s and 1980s. The National Black Caucus of State Legislators summarized such problems in a December 1992 resolution opposing contracting out. As the resolution noted, "Private sector contracts typically provide workers with lower wages, fewer benefits, and less opportunity for advancement, thereby eliminating middle-income jobs and expanding low-wage employment, which in turn results in a lower tax base for the community and an increase in the number of people in need of social services."

Masking Budget Cuts

As services have been decentralized, funds have not always followed. In Milwaukee, for example, services such as "data transfer" used to be funded centrally. This was "decentralized" and each school is now charged a monthly fee for access to Central Office's computer system and its information on everything from student addresses to academic records. Similarly, supply funds for exceptional education teachers were "decentralized" several years ago. In both situations, there was no increase in funds at the school level. Each school was thus forced to figure out how to get the money to pay for services that had been centrally funded.

Total decentralization relieves the school board and superintendent of hard political decisions of what to cut. Instead, such decisions are transferred to the school level. One can argue that those in the schools know how best to implement cuts so they don't hurt educational quality. But such decentralization also masks the budget cuts, not only making them more politically manageable but undermining attempts to organize public opposition to the cuts. Rather than fighting the state legislature for more funds, parents and teachers are focused on fighting each other at the school level. Seen from this perspective, decentralization is a brilliant political move by conservatives to under-

cut attempts to organize for more money for urban schools.

Government Bashing

In their most extreme form, proposals for total decentralization mesh all-too-neatly with a privatized, market-place system driven by competition and individual choice. Regulations — including those won as the result of social struggle in an attempt to guarantee access to the historically dispossessed, or those that protect the environment or worker's rights — are seen as bureaucratic restrictions on freedom. By their own admission, proponents of total decentralization seek to establish "independent and competitive enterprises" led by quasi-CEOs, with many services contracted out to private companies whose workers will earn minimum wages. Some such "enterprises" (formerly known as schools) might have a site-based council acting like a mini board of directors. Some will have a form of "shared decision-making." But few will truly empower parents and the community.

An alternative could be forged, but it would take more work. It would mean providing councils of parents, staff and community people with real power, including the hiring and firing of principals. It would mean a change in collective bargaining agreements so teachers are hired and transferred with the approval of school-based committees and evaluated by committees of peers, principals and parents. It would mean that state and federal governments provide sufficient resources so that parents can be genuinely involved, teachers sufficiently trained, and schools adequately funded. It would mean a commitment to the education of all children, even if that requires government regulations.

Ultimately, I believe, it would mean a rejection of schemes to completely decentralize schools. I say this more in sorrow than in anger. But progressive educators must not allow ourselves to be used by those who would turn our schools into yet another consumer item beholden to the ravages of the marketplace. ■

Bob Peterson teaches 5th grade at La Escuela Fratney and is an editor of Rethinking Schools.

Public School Choice: Keeping the Focus on Equity

By Ann Bastian

Being asked to write an article against school choice is a bit like being asked to burn the American flag at a VFW meeting. You have every right to do it, but do you want to? After all, choice is a bedrock American value. Applied to schools, it sounds great: students and parents get to choose, deserving schools get chosen.

But what if this is not the reality of school choice? In reality, school choice means very different things in different contexts. From the many versions of choice, we can construct three broad categories.

First, there are choice programs within a single public school district. These local, "controlled choice" plans seek to expand educational options.

Second, there are interdistrict and statewide public school plans. These seek to establish a public marketplace of schools through competition for enrollment.

Third, there are voucher plans that include private schools. These seek to create an unrestricted marketplace of competing public, private, and parochial schools.

Much of the debate over school choice has focused on vouchers. It was, after all, the key educational platform of the Republican Party. Vouchers deserve the most critical scrutiny as a threat to public education. But we should also look closely at the problems and potentials of choice programs that are strictly within the public schools.

The most promising examples of choice have occurred in the first category, within single public school districts. The programs most often cited are East Harlem in New York City, Montclair, N.J., and Cambridge, Mass. These programs, while not perfect, suggest several important features of a good choice model:

- Choice is just one element in a comprehensive reform strategy.
- Every school in the district has become a school of choice.

- School missions are diverse but have been developed in complementary rather than competitive ways.

- Teachers are given the time, training, and power to shape the school mission; parents also have a strong voice.

- Transportation costs are covered by the district.

- Parents and students are given enough information to make informed choices.

limited choice systems, even within poor districts, are likely to be more active, more educated, and financially better off. This only adds another dimension to the parental advantage that controls educational opportunity for most children. At the same time, parents gravitate toward schools that reflect their own racial and cultural background, so that limited choice offerings have not lessened school segre-

Choice only works well when there is a prior and steadfast commitment to equity, adequate funding, and internal school restructuring.

- Districts have secured significantly higher funding to sustain school improvement.

We should be fully aware, however, that even within a single public school district, controlled choice is no miracle cure for education. Where it works, it is one tool among others, and it only works well when there is a prior and steadfast commitment to equity, adequate funding, and internal school restructuring.

Creating Islands of Excellence?

School districts should be particularly cautious about choice programs that improve only a limited number of schools. This is often the case in "magnet" programs where students apply to "specialty" schools that receive extra resources and funding. When there are not enough good schools to go around, choice is more likely to create islands of excellence (or adequacy) than it is to stimulate improvement across the board.

When the good choices are limited, we see choice schools creaming off the most academically qualified students. Choice becomes another form of tracking. Studies also show that the parents who utilize

gation.

The results become very stark when we look at America's urban high school systems, where flagship academic magnets serving middle class students contrast with desperately deprived neighborhood high schools for the working class, the poor, and communities of color.

The same problems are posed by charter schools, which are intended to be unique, exempt from bureaucratic mandates and operated under special contract with school districts. Like magnets, charter schools are promoted as models for innovations. The problem is that if charter schools don't embrace the highest standards of equity in the students they enroll and retain, they too become another way to layer and segregate the choices in a school system. Given the current conditions of fiscal crisis and polarized resources facing most districts, charter schools can easily end up as isolated refuges for the adamant, the lucky, and by design, the privileged.

Unless our commitment to quality includes all schools, we are building more lifeboats, not better ships. The challenges for school choice are compounded in the

second category, which includes interdistrict and statewide public school choice. In this marketplace model, every public school competes for enrollments, on the premise that enrollment dollars are sufficient incentives for school innovation and improvement and that competition will reward the best. Eleven states have implemented varieties of statewide public school choice.

The data thus far are sketchy, except for the fact that nowhere has interdistrict choice ignited a revolution of school restructuring, parent engagement, and educational improvement as its proponents originally claimed. None of the statewide choice plans have included significant new resources for multiplying better schools or helping those at the bottom. The Massachusetts example (see the article, "Robbing the Poor to Pay the Rich," on page 62) highlights the potential fiscal nightmare for poor districts as students transfer out. Moreover, few states subsidize transportation costs for interdistrict transfers, ensuring that the class barriers to choice remain high and that outcomes remain skewed.

Overall, studies show that only a small number of parents opt for choice in statewide open enrollment programs. Data from four statewide plans (Minnesota, Massachusetts, Arkansas, and Arizona) indicate that choice participants are disproportionately white and affluent. Again, parental advantage seems decisive.

The limits of the marketplace models of choice are becoming clearer. The past decade of experience points to three central dangers:

• **Widening the gap between education "haves" and "have-nots."** Instead of becoming a tool for reform, this choice model rationalizes and accelerates inequity. It allows already advantaged schools to cream students and resources from other districts, leaving poorer schools and their students further depleted.

• **Weakening the link between schools and local communities.** In a large-scale marketplace model, schools are no longer bound by geographical or political communities. Schools and students would become even more removed from their

neighborhoods. Community control of schooling would be further eroded, making it even harder for communities of color and the poor to fight for equity and reform. Taxpayers, voters, relatives, and citizens would feel even less invested in education.

• Promoting the marketing of schools.

Where schools are competing for premium enrollments, the ability to attract students would depend as much on their ability to advertise as their capacity to educate. The obvious temptation would be for schools to rely even more heavily on standardized test scores and test-driven instruction, the "steroids approach" to performance enhancement.

The debate over school choice will be with us for a long time, even if voucher plans and private school choice options are soundly defeated. In weighing the problems and potentials, we need to keep in mind the most basic and practical question for any choice program: does it fix what's really wrong?

There is nothing inherent in school choice that deals with key issues such as smaller class and school size, teacher training, multicultural curricula, teacher-parent collaboration, youth services, or equal and adequate funding. Moreover, choice is deflecting attention from such key issues.

Nowhere have limited or selective choice schools been found to promote restructuring in schools across the system. A national study by the Carnegie Foundation concurs with the conclusions drawn in a recent review of choice and voucher programs by the Harvard School Choice Project: "It seems unlikely that choice by itself will stimulate creativity and improvement in the development of new, more effective educational programs."

The hard reality is that there's no short cut to building good schools. Like parenting children, educating children is based on human relationships, the quality of

which depends very much on the support systems surrounding the family and school. We have public education because we need a community and government support system to sustain this enormous undertaking, to make an unconditional investment in every child, to invest in the future as well as the present, to serve both individuals and communities.



Credit: Milwaukee Public Schools

School enrollments are not chips to be brokered in a marketplace, public or private. Even in our post-industrial consumer society, some choices are not about buying and selling. ■

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For-Profit Firms Fail to Deliver

By Barbara Miner

The history of for-profit companies running public schools can be easily summarized: The companies are long on promises and short on delivery.

The two leading businesses — Education Alternatives Inc. and The Edison Project — were both founded by businessmen with backgrounds in marketing and promotion. Both entered the education scene in the 1990s with a big splash, complete with front-page articles in the country's most prestigious publications. Both promised they held the key to the future of education in the United States.

Both are teetering on the brink of collapse.

Education Alternatives Inc., a publicly held company based in the Minneapolis area, no longer runs any public schools, having been kicked out of Baltimore and Hartford, CT., during the 1995-96 school year. Its stock, at a high of \$48.75 in November 1993, had plummeted to \$4 a share by spring 1996. Internally, the company was in chaos and three of its top executives had left by the end of 1995.

The Edison Project, meanwhile, initially boasted it would build a chain of 1,000 private schools. But it opened with only four public schools in 1995-96, having spent somewhere between \$40 and \$60 million on research and development that consisted primarily of pulling together already existing "best practices," and on market studies, travel expenses, and more-than-generous salaries. Edison President and CEO Benno Schmidt Jr., for instance, makes an estimated \$1 million for overseeing schools with a total of about 2,300 students.

Various explanations have been given for the companies' less-than-impressive performances. But the heart of the problem is two-fold: a mistaken assumption that urban systems have more money than they know what to do with and are merely mis-spending it; and an equally mistaken view that a more businesslike approach will automatically improve academic achievement.

"People have found out that school systems are run more efficiently than their reputations indicate," notes Michael Caserly, executive director of the Council for Great City Schools. "There isn't a lot of slop lying around on which to get rich."

And as DeWayne Boyd, superintendent of the Bremerton, Wash., schools, notes about the second point: "People seem to assume that raising performance is an easy thing, that business can just come in and do it. If it was that easy, we would have done it a long time ago."

It is not just educators and politicians

The company's first major coup was in Baltimore. In 1992, it signed a 5-year contract to run eight elementary and one middle school, with the number of schools later increased to 11. Political support for the experiment was initially high, and Superintendent Walter Amprey was a strong EAI booster. But the honeymoon didn't last long and by the fall of 1995, EAI was told to get out of town.

EAI had always earned high grades for fixing up the physical appearance of its schools. But even its supporters could not ignore the company's long list of prob-

Despite grandiose claims, both Education Alternatives Inc. and the Edison Project are teetering on the brink of collapse.

who are learning this lesson; even business interests are catching on. *The Hartford Business Journal* wrote in a 1994 editorial: "State and local governments have been running these [school] systems around the world for years. They end up running them because there's no money in it, just like there's no money in running a police department, fire department and so on. You can't turn an inherently unprofitable business into a profitable one just by turning it over to the private sector."

History of EAI and Edison

Education Alternatives Inc. was started by former Xerox salesman John Golle in 1986 and initially concentrated on private schools. Profits were slim, however, and by the 1990s the company had set its sight on public schools. As Golle told *Forbes* magazine in a 1992 interview, "There's so much fat in the schools that even a blind man without his cane could find the way."

Golle has consistently boasted that his company can run public schools for the same amount of money, improve achievement — and make a profit. It is failing on all three accounts.

lems. Most important, the company got more money than other schools and didn't do any better.

EAI schools, for instance, received 11% more per school than comparable Baltimore public schools. Yet the students did no better academically, and in reading actually did worse. Furthermore, the company was found to have illegally violated special education rules and had mainstreamed special ed kids not as a matter of educational reform, but as a way to save money.

Most damaging, however, were charges that the EAI had falsified data. For example, the company was forced to repay the city of Baltimore \$338,500 in 1994 because it had used inflated enrollment figures. In another mis-step, EAI proudly announced that attendance had improved 22.2% in its schools, when the real figure was 2.2%. It blamed the problem on a clerical error. EAI had also boasted that test scores had improved dramatically, but then had to retract the claim when it was shown to be false. Again, a clerical error was cited.

EAI didn't fare any better in Hartford. It originally signed a contract in October

1994 to run all of the system's 32 schools but by June the number was reduced to six. Disputes between Hartford and EAI continued, primarily over finances and budget plans — for instance EAI's proposed budget that called for eliminating 300 teaching positions. Superintendent Eddie Davis widely attacked the budget, noting it would dramatically increase class size. School principals said the budget would devastate guidance, nursing, and other services deemed unimportant by EAI.

Hartford officials, meanwhile, claimed the company hadn't saved it any money and refused to pay the \$11 million EAI said it was owed. EAI was forced to take a \$5.5 million write-off on the project, relations continued to deteriorate, and in January 1996, Hartford pulled the plug on its experiment with EAI.

After the Hartford debacle, Golle told stockholders that the company would now concentrate on suburban districts, where the per-pupil average expenditure is significantly higher than in urban districts. By the spring of 1996, its only contract with a public school system was a \$100,000 consulting deal with the Wappingers Board of Education in New York state. To help solve its public image problem, the company hired a New York PR firm. Wall Street, meanwhile, has its own view of EAI's prospects. The company's stock remains mired in the \$4 range — a long way from its \$48.75 high.

Edison's Dim Light Bulb

The Edison Project is newer than EAI but its list of unfulfilled claims is equally long.

Edison is the brainchild of entrepreneur/marketer Christ Whittle. A media wunderkind, Whittle launched an empire that led to glowing headlines but fell apart in the 1990s amid charges of mismanagement, extravagant expense accounts, and overstated claims.

Unlike EAI, Edison is a privately held company, so details on its finances do not have to be publicly released. What is known, however, is not encouraging.

Whittle publicly announced his education plans in May 1991. He said he would build a nationwide chain of private, for-

profit schools, banking his effort on the re-election of then-President George Bush and the hoped-for adoption of a nationwide system of publicly funded vouchers for private schools.

Whittle originally said he would raise \$2.5 billion from private investors for Edison. By May 1993, after Bush's defeat made it clear that national vouchers were a chimera, he had reduced that figure to \$750 million. By August, the media reported that Edison would be kept afloat only by existing partners in Whittle Communications; no new investors were forthcoming. As education professor Alex Molnar notes in his forthcoming book *Giving Kids the Business*, "Thus, apart from money out of his own pocket and the initial funds pledged by his partners, Whittle was unable, after two years of intense effort, to attract support from a single additional investor."

Whittle's woes weren't over. By the spring of 1994 his media empire was collapsing, triggered by the default on a \$100 million bridge loan. The only profitable enterprise — Channel One — was up for sale. As one Wall Street source said of the developments: "He [Whittle] is cashing out. ... This raises the issue: How credible can he be in the future?"

Channel One was sold in August 1994, leaving Whittle with Edison as his only

remaining project. Again, both financial and educational predictions were scaled back.

Having exhausted the estimated \$40 to \$60 million in start-up funds, Whittle had to hustle for more money if he was to actually open any schools. But it's hard raising money for schools that don't exist. He was able to announce in March 1995 that he had raised \$30 million, all but \$12 million from investors led by either Whittle or Schmidt. The rest came from the venture capital Sprout Group, which is also involved in for-profit healthcare management. Whittle has admitted that new investments will be needed if Edison is to grow beyond the 1996-97 school year.

With the new infusion of \$30 million — raising the amount spent on Edison to somewhere between \$70 and \$90 million — Edison opened four schools in the fall of 1995. It hopes to bring the number of schools to eight or ten by the fall of 1996.

It's too soon to answer whether Edison will be able to deliver on its educational claims. The bigger question it must answer if it is to survive, however, is how its investors will recoup the millions they have already poured into Edison. It is a question that Whittle has been unable to answer. ■



Credit: Huck Konopacki Labor Cartoons

Massachusetts: Robbing The Poor to Pay the Rich

By Stan Karp

Massachusetts offers a good example of how poorly designed public school choice plans can combine with financial pressures to push school systems in disastrous directions.

In September 1991, Massachusetts passed a public school choice scheme that, stripped of its rhetorical trappings, encouraged students to leave poor districts for rich ones.

"Participating districts" could open their doors to out-of-district students. "Home" or sending districts were charged a "tuition" roughly equivalent to the per pupil expenditure in the receiving district. This meant a child leaving a district with a \$4000 per pupil average expenditure for one with a \$7000 figure took \$7000 of the home district's funds—more than the home district would have gotten if the student had stayed put.

Predictable Effects

The formula had predictable effects. In the first year, about 45 districts signed on to receive students. About 830 students jumped. Just six poorer districts paid about half of the total tuition transfers, while seven wealthier districts took in about 75% of the total.

The schools of Brockton were particularly swamped by the combined onslaught of "free market" reform and "free market" recession. In Winter of 1992 an NEA newsletter reported, "Brockton, just outside of Boston, once boasted of being among the top school systems in the nation. Not anymore. ... More than 200 Brockton educators have been laid off this school year, and the average class size is now up to 37." On top of these cutbacks, the first year of

The Massachusetts experience shows that if politicians jump on the public school choice bandwagon without thinking through the consequences, they may end up exacerbating the inequities between poor and affluent school districts.

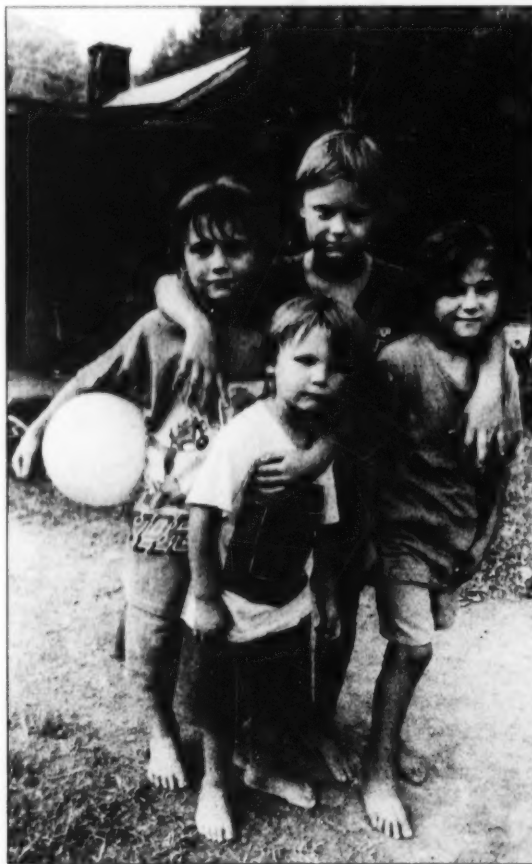
the "choice" plan cost Brockton close to \$1 million. Over 100 Brockton students enrolled in nearby Avon, where pupil spending is several times the Brockton average.

The Massachusetts Dept. of Education acknowledged that the impact of these

"gross inequities" was "punitive on poorer school districts." In 1994 the state revised the funding formula to reduce—but not completely stop—the flow of funds from poorer to richer districts. But these revisions were accompanied by the program's steady expansion. From 830 students and 45 districts in the first year, the number has risen to over 6,000 students and 89 districts. Moreover, while districts originally had to vote to opt into the choice plan, they now have to specifically vote *not* to participate or they'll be included.

Modifications of the original program have not changed the basic character of the Massachusetts program — or its basic injustice. It's still a siphon for draining students and resources from poorer districts to wealthier ones. It still does nothing to improve education in poorer districts, and it's still part of an overall effort to weaken the system of public education. In that regard, the Massachusetts plan is an all-too-accurate example of what many public school choice plans are all about. ■

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Credit: Rick Reinhard

Chicago: Public School Choice and Inequality

By Jonathan Kozol

In the following selection from Savage Inequalities, Kozol talks about class and racial inequities surrounding some proposals for public school choice. He refers to South Loop Elementary in Chicago, a citywide magnet fine arts school built at the insistence of residents of a condominium project with many white, affluent families. Children from a nearby low-income public project, Hilliard Homes, are not allowed into the school until third grade. Before then, the children from the project had to go to a "temporary branch school" in a "small, prefabricated metal building surrounded on three sides by junkyards."

If the children of the Hilliard project are successfully excluded from the magnet school across the street, how much harder will it be to get those children into magnet schools in other sections of the city? And will those children "choose" to go to "schools of choice" if it is made clear they are not wanted? This is an example of the ways that people may be taught to modify and to restrict their choices. The parents, of course, conditioned already by a lifetime of such lessons, may not even need to have their dreams further restricted. The energy to break out of their isolation may have atrophied already.

School boards think that, if they offer the same printed information to all parents, they have made choice equally accessible. That is not true, of course, because the printed information won't be read, or certainly will not be scrutinized aggressively, by parents who can't read or who read very poorly. But, even if a city could contrive a way to get the basic facts disseminated widely, can it disseminate audacity as well? Can it disseminate the limitless horizons of the middle class to those who have been trained to keep their eyes close to ground?

People can only choose among the



Credit: Rick Reinhard

things they've heard of. That is one problem that a "choice" plan must confront. But it is no less true that they can only choose the things they think they have a right to and the things they have some reason to believe they will receive. People who have forever been turned down by neighborhoods where they have looked for housing and by hospitals where they have looked for care when they were ill are not likely to have hopeful expectations when it comes to public schools.

Misplaced Faith in the Market

The White House [under former President Bush], in advancing the agenda for a "choice" plan, rests its faith on market mechanisms. What reason have the black and very poor to lend their credence to a market system that has proved so obdurate and so resistant to their pleas at every turn? Placing the burden on the individual to break down doors in finding better education for a child is attractive to conservatives because it reaffirms their faith in individual ambition and autonomy. But to ask an individual to break down doors that we have chained and bolted in ad-

vance of his arrival is unfair.

There are conscientious people who believe that certain types of "choice" within the public schools can help to stimulate variety and foster deeper feelings of empowerment in parents. There are also certain models — in East Harlem in New York, for instance — which suggest that this is sometimes possible; but these models are the ones that also place a high priority on not excluding children of the less successful and less knowledgeable parents and, in the East Harlem situation, they are also models that grew out of social activism, and their faculty and principals continue to address the overarching inequalities that render their experiment almost unique. Without these countervailing forces — and they are not very often present — "choice" plans of the kind the [Bush] White House has proposed threaten to compound the present fact of racial segregation with the added injury of caste discrimination, further isolating those who, like the kids at Hilliard Homes, have been forever, as it seems, consigned to places nobody would choose if he had any choice at all. ■

Bradley Foundation Bankrolls Conservative Agenda

By Barbara Miner

Michael S. Joyce could easily be mistaken for a middle-aged Clark Kent: glasses, hair thinning at the top, a slightly-bulging waistline, a well-tailored but nondescript suit and tie. Nothing in his appearance compels one to take a second look.

But beneath that Clark Kent facade lies someone who, while not a superman, is arguably one of the most powerful conservatives in American politics.

Joyce was named in an *Atlantic Monthly* article in January 1986 as one of the three people most responsible for the triumph of the conservative intellectual movement. *The Chicago Tribune* noted in 1993 that he may be the voice of the GOP future. A confidant of Republican heavyweights such as William Bennett and Jack Kemp, Joyce is a protégé of Irving Kristol, widely considered the godfather of the neoconservative movement.

Joyce's power does not rest with the company he keeps, however, but with his job. As president of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation based in Milwaukee, Joyce makes crucial decisions on who will, or won't, receive some of the millions of dollars in grants the Foundation makes each year — \$24 million in 1995. No matter how you count it, that's a lot of money.

Under Joyce's leadership the Bradley Foundation has become the country's top funder of conservative research, publications and think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. Further, Joyce has helped establish a network of conservative foundations who together fund an even broader nexus of think tanks, researchers and publications, with the explicit purpose of trying to mold public opinion and policy.

"Mike is pretty close to being the central figure [within conservative foundations], the chairman of the board or whatever you want to call it," according to



Credit: The Bradley Legacy, by John Gurda

The Allen-Bradley clocktower in Milwaukee; one of the more visible signs of the Bradley legacy.

Waldemar Nielsen, author of *Golden Donors*, a book on the foundation movement.

Although more liberal foundations outnumber the conservatives, the liberal foundations "don't have a really sharp political program that they are seriously pushing," Nielsen told *Rethinking Schools*. "They are kind of bumbling along. But the neo-conservatives are much more consciously, purposefully, and in a focused way, trying to advance their ideas."

It is impossible to enter into a debate on key issues in American politics, whether crime, teenage pregnancy, drugs, welfare, or school "choice," and not butt up against Bradley-funded research. Further, the Bradley Foundation's influence on Republican and conservative politics has become more influential in recent years because "the White House is no longer a steady source of patronage," the *Chicago Tribune* noted in a March 4, 1993 article on Joyce and the Bradley Foundation. "There probably will be no shortage of proposals to revitalize the right, but it usually takes money to compete in the marketplace of ideas."

Of special concern to those involved in education, Joyce has taken on school "choice" as one of his pet projects. Unfailingly critical of public schools, Joyce argues that school "choice" is the central reform in education today.

"School choice, the reason why it evokes such a shrill response from the defenders of the monopoly, is because it is about real reform," Joyce

told *Rethinking Schools* during a wide-ranging two-part interview. "It is about changing power relationships." Asked what might be other important education initiatives, whether curriculum reform or funding equity, Joyce dismissed them by saying: "All the rest are palliatives. They are incremental at best. They palliate and disguise."

The Birth of the Bradley Foundation
The Lynde and Harry Bradley Founda-

tion began its journey to the world of major league politics in 1985. In that year the Allen-Bradley Co. in Milwaukee was sold to Rockwell International Corp. for \$1.65 billion and the foundation, which owned about 20% of the stock, saw its assets jump from less than \$14 million to more than \$290 million. In 1994, they stood at \$389 million.

Joyce, who previously worked at the John M. Olin Foundation in New York, was hired in 1985 to shepherd the Bradley Foundation as it moved into the big leagues of national grant-making. (The Bradley Foundation, along with Olin, The Sarah Scaife Foundation, and the Smith-Richardson Foundation are often called the Four Sisters because of their dominance of conservative funding.) Despite Joyce's background in high-powered politics along the Boston-Washington corridor, he seems to have had little trouble adjusting to life in Milwaukee. In a profile in *The Milwaukee Journal* Sunday magazine several years ago, Joyce unabashedly boasted about his new home: "People are so civil here. Businessmen act like working-class people, doctors go for fish fries. It's an almost classless society."

Joyce, meanwhile, received \$310,000 in salary and benefits in 1992.

Joyce is credited with making the Olin and Bradley Foundations more politically focused and organizationally coherent, and with also spurring the entire conservative foundation movement in this direction. The main vehicle for doing so has been the Philanthropy Roundtable. Joyce chairs the Roundtable, and the Bradley Foundation helps fund it. The Roundtable, which was formally established in 1991, helps conservative grantmakers develop strategy and coordinate their efforts. It is through the efforts of Roundtable members, for example, that a network of conservative think tanks have proliferated at the statewide level, providing policy papers on local issues.

The Roundtable was set up as an alternative to the Council on Foundations, the non-profit umbrella of the philanthropy movement. Conservatives had been critical of the Council for its alleged "political correctness," funding of liberal causes, and encouragement of including more

women and minorities on foundation boards and staffs. Joyce, for instance, had complained that "to go to a meeting of the Council on Foundations is to expose yourself to the extremism of feminist ideology. You would have to watch what was said; they are very unhappy places."

Bradley Grants

A look at Bradley's national grants underscores the overall thrust of the foundation's perspective. A significant portion of the money goes to support conservative research at well-known universities. Despite the foundation's often populist rhetoric, it has an acute sense of the need to

educational Excellence Network (\$780,000); Ethics and Public Policy Center (\$642,000); Foreign Policy Research Institute (\$520,600); *The New Criterion* magazine (\$560,000); Free Congress Research and Education Foundation (\$1.47 million); Heritage Foundation (\$2.7 million); Hudson Institute (\$708,517); Institute for Contemporary Studies (\$900,000); Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (\$459,579); Institute on Religion and Public Life, Inc. (\$645,000); Landmark Legal Foundation (\$310,000); Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (\$275,000); *The National Interest* and *The Public Interest* magazines (\$1 million); National Associa-

The Bradley Foundation has been a top funder of conservative causes — from school vouchers to books such as The Bell Curve.

influence elite opinion makers. As Joyce told the *Chronicle of Higher Education* several years ago, "Elite opinion is formed in America at the top of a pyramid ... elite institutions [are] important in the shaping of public policy."

From August 1990 to December 1992, to name a few examples, Boston College was authorized \$2.3 million in grants, Harvard University was authorized \$3.58 million, and the University of Chicago was authorized \$3.7 million. The grants generally were to fund Bradley Fellows or specific programs and studies with a conservative orientation. (Figures for this story refer to grants authorized between August 1990 and December 1992 period, unless otherwise indicated.)

The foundation has also been a key funder of conservative think tanks and policy centers, and its list of grantees reads like a Who's Who of nationally prominent organizations. They include: The American Enterprise Institute (\$2.38 million); *American Spectator* magazine (\$345,000); Center for Strategic and International Studies (\$587,302); Center for the Study of Popular Culture (\$265,000); *Commentary* magazine (\$450,000); Edu-

tion of Scholars (\$378,400); National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (\$720,000); National Endowment for Democracy (\$555,000); National Strategy Information Center (\$781,535); and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation (\$1.5 million).

While few of these groups are household names, most are well-known among the power elite in the government and the national media, who in turn help disseminate the think tanks' ideas. The neoconservatives, for all their complaints about the media's liberal bias, are far more adept at playing the media game than liberals. William Greider, in his widely acclaimed 1992 book on the demise of democratic institutions, *Who Will Tell the People*, has a telling passage about the relationship between conservative think tanks and the media. He writes:

"The sponsored research at Washington think tanks has become a principle source for the ideas that reporters judge to be newsworthy and for the packaged opinion from 'experts' that reporters dutifully quote in every current subject. David Ignatius, former editor of 'Outlook,' *The Washington Post's* Sunday opinion sec-

continued on page 66

tion, wrote: "It often seems that these large and well-endowed organizations exist for the sole purpose of providing articles for opinion sections and op-ed pages." That, of course, is precisely why they exist.

"I will confess here to a dangerous vice," *The Post* editor declared. "I like think tanks, and mainly for one simple reason: their members know how to play the game, that is, they know how to be provocative, they can write quickly under deadline pressure and they don't mind being heavily edited." Ignatius mentioned as his favorite sources of opinion: the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Brookings Institution, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute. Except for Carnegie, all of these organizations are financed by major banks and corporations as their self-interested and tax-deductible contribution to the democratic debate."

And, one might add, all except for Car-

negie receive substantial Bradley money.

Bradley-funded research rarely stirs enough controversy to tarnish the foundation's image. But there are exceptions.

Among the grants in 1992 was \$11,850 "to support a book project on Anita Hill." The book by David Brock, *The Real Anita Hill: the Untold Story*, attacked Hill's credibility and was a follow-up to an article by Brock in which he had called Hill, among other things, "a bit nutty and a bit slutty." The book was the subject of a blistering critique in the May 1993 *New Yorker*, which suggested that it was little more than a hatchet job on Hill. Joyce, however, defended the foundation's funding of the book. The book "was a very thorough and meticulous piece of research," he told *Milwaukee Magazine*.

The Brock/Hill incident is also illuminating because it reveals just the tip of the iceberg of the interlocking connections among conservative foundations, publications, and key ideologues. The Brock book, for example, was also funded by the

Olin Foundation — whose head, William Simon, was the finance chair of the Citizens' Committee to Confirm Clarence Thomas, according to the *New Yorker* article. (Simon was also the one who hired Joyce to run Olin.) Further, the original article was printed in the *American Spectator* — also funded by Olin and Bradley. Brock, meanwhile, was previously a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, another Bradley/Olin grant recipient.

The Brock book was not the only time in the last year that a Bradley grantee was accused of smear tactics. Another controversial incident involved Clint Bolick's attack on Lani Guinier to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division — a campaign that even in the rough-and-tumble world of Washington politics was seen as a particularly low point. Bolick is litigation director at the Washington-based Institute for Justice, which Bradley granted \$35,000 in general support funds. (Interestingly, Bolick was an assistant at the Equal Employment Opportunity Com-

Bradley, *The Bell Curve* and School Choice

Given the Bradley Foundation's \$1 million funding of *The Bell Curve*, it is not surprising that the book's key education reform is school choice, including public funds for private and religious schools.

Co-authors Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein argue that parental choice will lead to "orderly classrooms and well-enforced codes of behavior" — although they merely proclaim faith in such a transformation and never explain how it will happen. They also argue that "gifted" children would benefit from school choice because parents of bright children want "an authentically tougher education for their children" and would be able to seek out a school dedicated to like-minded parents of the genetically intelligent. (Most parents are not seriously interested in a more rigorous education, according to Murray and Herrnstein, and many African-American children are genetically incapable of high educational achievement.)

Murray and Herrnstein outline their recommendations at the end of Chapter

Murray and Herrnstein admit that their education proposal 'will sound, and is, elitist.'

18, "The Leveling of American Education." Regarding federal policy, they mention two other specifics in addition to choice. First, the federal government should establish a scholarship program awarded not on the basis of need, but to those earning top scores on standardized tests. Second, Washington should "reallocate some portion of existing elementary and secondary school federal aid away from programs for the disadvantaged to programs for the gifted."

Other policy recommendations are not as specific, but call for a shift in thinking away from the "disadvantaged" toward the "gifted." On p. 436, for example, Murray and Herrnstein write that "policymakers need to be more realistic about what can be done to improve the education of students in a heterogeneous, nontotalitarian

country. Specifically, critics of American education must come to terms with the reality that in a universal education system, many students will not reach the level of education that most people view as basic." (emphasis in original).

Later in the chapter, Murray and Herrnstein argue for a return to "the concept of the educated man" — placing greater emphasis on gifted children under the rationale that they are destined to lead our country. "Most gifted students are going to grow up segregated from the rest of society no matter what," they write. "They will then go to the elite colleges no matter what, move into successful careers no matter what, and eventually lead the institutions of this country no matter what."

"Our proposal will sound, and is, elitist," Murray and Herrnstein admit. ■

mission when Clarence Thomas was chairman; he forged a close friendship with Thomas and asked him to be godfather to his youngest son.)

It was Bolick who led the charge on Lani Guinier with a *Wall Street Journal* opinion headlined, "Clinton's Quota Queens." The name stuck, preventing Guinier from mounting a defense before she was jettisoned by a nervous Bill Clinton. But Bolick used more than clever headlines to defeat Guinier. Bolick and colleague Chip Mellow "became what they call 'information central' for the Guinier battle, running up thousands of dollars in photocopying bills as they distributed more than 100 copies of her articles to key Senate staff aides, journalists, editorial writers and other 'opinion leaders,'" according to the June 6, 1993 *Washington Post*.

To education activists, Bolick is known for his advocacy of school vouchers. His Institute for Justice, for example, has filed lawsuits demanding that low-income parents in Chicago and Los Angeles receive state vouchers for private school tuition. The Institute is also defending the school voucher plan in Puerto Rico. And while at his former job with the Landmark Legal Foundation (which received \$310,000 in Bradley money), Bolick successfully defended a legal challenge to the Milwaukee private school voucher plan.

Bradley Funds Bell Curve

In Milwaukee, the foundation was also embroiled in a local controversy in the summer of 1995 when area business and community leaders charged the foundation with taking part in a "disinformation campaign" to undermine an eight-year, \$7.7 million initiative to increase jobs in the central city, funded in large part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Bradley was accused of leaking confidential information to a free-lance journalist who wrote an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* condemning the jobs initiative because, among other things, one of the sponsoring groups was involved in a campaign calling for a "living wage" of \$7.70 an hour plus benefits for contracted-out city jobs. The op-ed also accused the jobs initiative of operating in a building, The Peace Action Center, that houses "radical rereads" such as the antinuclear group



Credit: Ted Rall, Chronicle Features

Mobilization for Survival.

Perhaps the most serious controversy for the Bradley Foundation, however, centers on its funding of Charles Murray's co-authorship of *The Bell Curve*.

The Bradley Foundation paid Murray nearly \$1 million over eight years to research and write *The Bell Curve*. It did so well aware of the nature of Murray's research. When Murray was asked to leave the Manhattan Institute in 1989 because of the controversy surrounding his project, the Bradley Foundation specifically decided to continue his funding. By 1994 the foundation had decided it liked Murray's work so much that it raised his annual stipend to \$163,000. Further, Joyce reiterated throughout the controversy that he was proud to sponsor Murray's work. He has called Murray "one of the foremost thinkers of our time" and applauds him for tackling a "taboo subject."

The Bell Curve, co-authored by Murray and the late Richard Herrnstein, skyrocketed onto best seller lists in late 1994 and ignited a new round of justifications for the increasing racism and poverty that plague the United States.

The book's most disturbing formulations are that intelligence overwhelmingly determines social class; that intelligence is a unitary and unchangeable quality largely determined by genetics; that IQ tests accurately measure this intelligence; and that African Americans are dispropor-

tionately poor because as a group they score lower on IQ tests than whites and therefore are irrevocably less intelligent. Not surprisingly, Murray and Herrnstein argue that the key educational policy recommendation flowing from their book is school choice, including public funds for private and religious schools.

The Bradley Foundation's willingness to fund *The Bell Curve* should be a warning to African Americans who argue that vouchers will improve educational opportunities for the poor, argues C.J. Prentiss, an Ohio legislator who has been active in the African-American community in support of public school reform. "You have to be suspicious of someone who argues that on the one hand, African Americans are dumber than whites, and then, on the other, comes into the Black community and says, 'We are going to make you as bright as you can be, here are some vouchers ...,'" Prentiss said. "I believe vouchers are simply a way to dismantle public schools and use tax dollars to fund an elitist private school system. But voucher advocates know it would be suicide to say that openly." ■

This article is based on an essay that appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of Rethinking Schools. Information on The Bell Curve dates from the book's release the following fall.

Conservatives Push the Campaign for "Parental Rights"

By Barbara Miner

The Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act provides a good example where economic and religious conservatives are unified around specific legislation. It also shows how seemingly spontaneous grass-roots movements can have their roots in well-funded campaigns by conservative power-brokers.

The Parental Rights Act, as it is often called, was introduced in Congress in the fall of 1995. It is a key priority of the religious right, which has grown increasingly restless with Congress's focus on budget issues and is demanding more emphasis on social concerns.

tana, president-elect of the National School Boards Association, said in testimony before Congress in the fall of 1995. "But when you look into it, it doesn't stand for that at all."

As Michael Katz, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania, has argued: "Public policy has to continuously strike a balance. Just waving parents' rights around as a flag is a very simplistic notion."

Some people have argued that rather than furthering parent involvement in schools, such legislation would lead to a plethora of legal action.

"As an attorney, I can tell you this is

The federal legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and in the House by Rep. Steve Largent (R-Okla.). Its supporters include the Christian Coalition, the American Legislative Exchange Council (a Washington group of conservative legislators), the Home School Legal Defense Association, the Family Research Council, the Rutherford Institute, and Focus on the Family. Nationally, the effort is being spear-headed by Of The People, an organization based in Arlington, Va.

At federal hearings on the legislation on Dec. 5, 1995, those testifying presented a picture of families under siege by dictatorial bureaucrats. Rep. Largent, for instance, told of a story in *USA Today* about a North Carolina county mandating children's bedtimes. Under the mandate, he said, parents "could actually be taken to court, thrown in jail, because their kids exceeded the bedtime limit."

Education Week looked into Largent's story. They called *USA Today*, which said Largent's tale was apparently based on a 90-word brief on "parenting standards" in Durham, N.C., for social workers, teachers and others who might be confronted with cases of child abuse. "The 'mandated bedtimes' Largent cited were actually suggested cutoff hours for young baby-sitters," *Education Week* reported in its Feb. 14 issue.

Charges were even more outrageous at a hearing in October 1995 on legislation in Georgia. One parent, for example, said schools in Floyd County were hypnotizing children and probing their subconsciousness, and that levitation was practiced in science classes. School officials in Floyd County flatly deny the charges and say the woman making the claims has been asked to provide specifics to back up her charges but has consistently failed to do so.

The movement for the parental rights is

The Parental Right Movement is not a spontaneous, grass-roots upsurge but a well-funded campaign by conservative organizations.

The parental rights legislation states: "The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed." Similar measures have been introduced in more than 25 states.

Few would disagree with the sentiment behind such a statement. But critics say that the legislation is part of a broader attempt by the right wing to foment mistrust of public education and government social programs, in line with an agenda of providing tax dollars for private schools and of defunding social programs. They also say it would potentially abridge children's rights by permitting, for example, "reasonable corporal discipline," and would make it difficult to develop district- or community-wide approaches to curriculum.

"When you first hear the bill's title, it makes you want to stand up and hum the 'Star Spangled Banner,'" Sammy Quin-

another lawyers' relief act or full employment act," August W. Steinhilber, general counsel for the National School Boards Association, told *The New York Times*. "And it would raise total havoc with the curriculum. The irony is that everyone is saying the curriculum should be enriched and broadened, but this would give parents veto power over almost anything they didn't like."

What of Children's Rights?

Shirley Igo of the National PTA argues that the main problem with the legislation is that it only addresses the rights of parents, which doesn't always coincide with the needs of children. "There's a very fine balance between the rights of parents and the rights of children," she said. "We're strong advocates for parents, responsibility and involvement, but this tips the balance where only parents rights are protected."

not as pure a grass-roots movement as it may seem. It dates in part to a 1992 report by Republican guru William Kristol, who at the time was working for the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation in Milwaukee on the "Bradley Project of the 90s," designed to develop a conservative agenda.

Michael Joyce, president of the Bradley Foundation, began a series of speeches and articles in 1993 summarizing the issues raised by Kristol. A key item involved building a movement for parents' rights as a way to counter the women's and gay movements and to rally people against the "nanny state."

In his speeches, Joyce warned that a "parents' revolt" was being organized by conservative strategists. "A group of young political activists instrumental in last decade's supply-side economic revolution has decided the parents' revolt of the 90s is the political equivalent of the taxpayers' revolt of the 80s," Joyce wrote in the conservative journal *Wisconsin Interest*, in an article summarizing remarks made to the Milwaukee Bar Association in June 1993. "Their objective is to introduce amendments to state constitutions throughout the nation stating simply, 'The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed.'"

That is the exact wording of the legislation introduced this fall in Congress.

Joyce and the Bradley Foundation provided more than ideology, however. According to the foundation's annual report, it granted \$250,000 in general support funding to the Of the People Foundation in 1993 and 1994.

The Bradley Foundation's funding of the parental rights movement is in line with a more activist-oriented agenda in recent years on school issues.



Credit: Rick Reinhard

Joyce makes clear that, where schools are concerned, the only way to ensure parents' rights is to demolish the public school system and move toward a voucher system. Parents can thus avoid the messiness of struggling for their views within a democratic system. They can opt out of controversies over multicultural curriculum, sexual harassment policies, financial equity and so forth, and can instead send their children to a private school at public expense.

When asked by *Rethinking Schools* whether society at large has any rights or responsibilities in terms of the education of children, the only right Joyce mentioned during a 1994 interview was the right to protect public safety and require immunizations. Asked if society has a right to prohibit schools from discriminating on the grounds of race, religion, or sex, Joyce answered: "Well, there are schools

that are segregated according to religion right now." Asked if public funds should be used to support those schools he answered: "I don't think public funds should be used to support schools at all. Public funds should be used to support the parents' provision of education for their children. I think that is the public's responsibility."

Legitimizing Inequities

A parents'-rights-above-all approach legitimizes the many inequities in education, which often coincide with differences in the racial composition of schools. If parents are responsible only for the education of their own children and society's responsibilities are limited to immunizations and vouchers, who will ensure that all children have a chance at an equal education?

In the final analysis, Joyce's view of parent power is limited to the power to decide where one wants

their child to go to school — if one has enough money, if the school is close enough, if one likes the school, and if the school accepts the child. And, as is true in other areas where the market holds sway, such as housing and health care, those with more money will have more and better choices.

But what if parents decide through a democratic system that they would like to have an equitable public education for all children? That's the one alternative that's not possible under Joyce's scheme.

As Noam Chomsky, professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, notes: "It [Joyce's view] doesn't allow, in the case of education, the choice that American citizens have made over the years: that we should have a public education system that benefits everyone, because that's the kind of world we'd like to live in." ■

Privately Funded Voucher Plans Proliferate

By Barbara Miner

INDIANAPOLIS— If you live in New York, Boston, San Francisco, St. Louis, or Minneapolis, your area is one of 25 cities targeted by conservative forces who hope to establish a network of privately funded school voucher plans as part of efforts to make private school "choice" the dominant school reform in this country.

Privately funded programs may seem only peripherally connected with campaigns for publicly funded voucher plans. However, these private plans are an invaluable tactic in the conservative movement's strategic battle to institute universal voucher plans that use public tax dollars to fund religious and non-sectarian private schools.

Privately funded initiatives are essential in order "to provide the requisite momentum to a national debate on educational choice," according to a manual distributed at a 1992 conference in Indianapolis on how to organize such initiatives.

The first such plan was started in 1991 in Indianapolis with a \$1.2 million donation from the Golden Rule Insurance Company, after the Indiana legislature defeated a voucher bill. Under the program, a child whose family qualifies for the federal lunch program may receive half of the tuition of a private or parochial school, up to \$800. By 1992, bolstered by support from conservative think tanks and foundations, privately funded voucher plans had spread to Milwaukee, San Antonio, Texas, and Atlanta. [By 1995, programs were in 20 cities and served roughly 7,200 students. A new organization, CEO America, has been formed to coordinate and organize the programs. Based in Bentonville, Ark., CEO America includes John Walton, of Wal-Mart, on its board of directors. The Walton Family Foundation has promised to contribute \$2 million to CEO America in the next five years.]

The Indianapolis program was the brain-

child of J. Patrick Rooney, chairman of the board of the Golden Rule. While Rooney has stated in media reports that he has no intention of undercutting the public school system, his speech to the conference had a different emphasis. He said he had concluded over the years that "the problems are not fixable in the urban [school] systems" and he criticized efforts that focused on the public schools and the "perpetuation of a system that is not working."

Vouchers and Public Relations

Rooney also emphasized the enormous public relations strength of the privately funded voucher program, saying it had done more good in terms of the company image than anything Golden Rule had ever done. "I can tell you, the public relations benefits of this are immense," he said.

(Rooney, his executives and Golden Rules' PAC spent about \$1.4 million from 1990-1995 to lobby for changes in Medicare that, while of dubious medical benefit, would financially benefit the company. They also contributed more to the Republican National Committee than any other business last year, according to *The New Republic*. Consumer Reports, meanwhile, ranks Golden Rule near the bottom of medical insurance companies because of inadequate coverage, rate increases, and willingness to cancel policies.)

The three other main private voucher programs are all closely identified with conservative foundations or think tanks. In Milwaukee, the prominent and conservative Bradley Foundation — headed by free-market ideologue Michael Joyce — donated \$1.5 million to get a local program going. In San Antonio, the program was initiated by the Texas Public Policy Foundation and in Atlanta it was initiated by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation. (In all cases, separate non-profit groups have been set up to run the program, in part because this allows corporations to

make tax-deductible contributions. If the voucher were given directly to the parents, it would not be tax deductible.)

Links to Publicly Funded Vouchers

Kevin Teasley, one of the organizers of the 1993 unsuccessful voucher referendum in California, was one of several people who linked privately funded vouchers to publicly funded vouchers for private schools. Perhaps most important, he said, the private voucher system can be used to argue that the public is clamoring for "choice."

"When you see the number of children lining up for the financial opportunity to choose a different school, that's a very powerful message....," Teasley told the conference. "That message cannot be shot down rather easily by our opponents. It's worth its weight in gold."

Teasley also argued that despite its success, a private voucher program is limited by its reliance on corporate largesse. The long-term strategy, Teasley said, must focus on publicly funded, universal voucher systems.

Matt Glavin, president of the conservative Georgia Public Policy Foundation, explained it this way: "The Georgia Public Policy Foundation has an agenda, and it's not hidden.... It would be a dream of mine personally, and a goal of mine, to have the Georgia foundation shut down in four years because the legislature has adopted a voucher program."

Tom Tancredo, a former U.S. Department of Education official who helped organize the failed Colorado voucher referendum, also said he saw privately funded voucher plans as a tactic to build support for publicly funded vouchers. Referring to Golden Rule type initiatives he said, "All they are, really, are simply pump primers."

All conference participants in Indianapolis received a 181-page manual on how to organize a private voucher plan. Produced by the Texas Public Policy Found-



Credit: Kirk Anderson

dation, the manual includes everything from sample press releases, to tips on organizing, to articles of incorporation, to a software program for a database to administer the vouchers.

The manual made clear that supporters of privately funded vouchers have adopted a stealth strategy. "Every program would do well to conduct its entire developmental stage in total secrecy," the manual cautions. "The importance of this can not be over-stressed. It would be quite unfortunate for word to get out into the community prior to your being ready for public announcement. Should this happen you will find the "anti-choice" forces quickly at work to create an environment that would make it most difficult — if not impossible — to function and to enlist financial and other support."

The manual also argues that the key to a successful program is to present it in such a way that it undercuts any potential opposition. It notes that the similarities between the four main existing programs "are no accident."

The Indianapolis, Milwaukee, San Antonio, and Atlanta privately funded voucher

programs, for instance, emphasize that the program is designed to help moderate- and low-income families offset the cost of tuition at the private school of their choice. Their statements consciously do not talk about the broader voucher debate or problems in the public schools, or taxes, or unions, or test scores or any other issues that might arouse the least bit of controversy.

Inherent Criticism of Public Schools

As Rooney told the conference, "The way we always position it is, we're trying to help the children. Sure it is inherently a criticism of the public school system, but we don't define it that way."

The key marketing strategy rests on an exploitation of worthwhile concepts such as freedom of "choice" and parental rights.

"Sometimes, I think the way to do this is to simply stand up and say, parents should have the right to choose the schools their children will attend because parents should have the right to choose schools their children will attend. Thank you and good night," said David Boaz of the CATO Institute in Washington D.C. "I'm not

really sure why there needs to be more argument than that."

It was never suggested at the Indianapolis conference, for instance, that the larger society has an inherent interest in education issues. The argument was that parents have the right to do what they think is best for their child, and that's that. Another dominant theme was the unchallenged assumption that a market approach will magically improve our nation's schools. Throughout the conference, this argument was tinged with not-so-subtle anti-communist references to the breakup of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and calls to break the government's "monopoly" on education.

As Timothy Ehr Gott, administrator of the Indianapolis voucher program, said in the final words spoken at the conference: "Let's go out and give some of the same choices to our children that they have in Warsaw, Poland and Russia now." ■

Barbara Miner is managing editor of Rethinking Schools. A longer version of this article appeared in the Winter 1992-93 issue of Rethinking Schools (Vol. 7, No. 2).

Splits on the Right: Implications for Education

By Barbara Miner

The 1996 presidential primaries exposed the fault line that runs through the Republican Party between what are generally known as economic conservatives and social conservatives.

What might this mean for education?

Media scrutiny has spotlighted disagreement between the economic and social conservatives on abortion, NAFTA, and the role of big business in American life. But the Republicans seemingly are of one mind on education: abolish the U.S. Department of Education, return educational authority to the states and localities, and support privatization and vouchers. Even Colin Powell, the man the social conservatives loved to hate, supported publicly funded vouchers for private schools.

But this unity, built in part on the opportunism that always flourishes in an election year, masks important differences among conservatives on education issues.

Different terms are used to describe the split in the Republican Party: traditional vs. religious right, economic vs. social, mainstream vs. far right, Old Right vs. New Right. In education, it is most useful to view the cleavage as between the religious right — which not only bases its views on a literal interpretation of the Bible but which seeks to institute a theocratic form of government — and those who remain secular in their orientation despite rhetoric that often matches that of the religious right.

"The key difference is in the word religion," argued George Kaplan, an educational analyst in Washington, D.C., who has studied the religious right. "The Lamar Alexanders and Checker Finns of the world don't give two hoots and a holler about religion," Kaplan said, referring to Alexander, the former Republican presidential hopeful, and Finn, one of the foremost conservative education reformers in the



Credit: David Rae Morris/Impact Visuals

Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition.

country. "You'll never hear them talking about bringing up children under a strictly religious interpretation of the Bible. Their basic impulse is privatization — to get government out of education, not to get religion in. But the religious reformers want religion in the schools, in particular their specific view of religion."

The religious right is clear in its inter-

nal documents about its goal of an authoritarian theocracy. As Pat Robertson, head of the Christian Coalition, has bluntly stated: "There will never be world peace until God's house and God's people are given their rightful place of leadership at the top of the world. How can there be peace when drunkards, drug dealers, communists, atheists, New Age worshippers of

Satan, secular humanists, oppressive dictators, greedy money changers, revolutionary assassins, adulterers, and homosexuals are on top?"

In line with the mainstream media's description of the split in the Republican Party, this article will refer to the two major groupings as the religious right and the economic right. The term religious right refers to those Christian-based groups such as the Christian Coalition and far-right allies such as the Free Congress Foundation led by Paul Weyrich. (The paramilitary right is generally considered a distinct phenomenon, although it maintains strong links to some groups within the religious right.) The economic right refers to secular, more traditional conservatives and includes libertarians, entrepreneurs, free-market ideologues, so-called "moderate" Republicans, and cultural conservatives. It is particularly important to understand the cultural orientation of many of those aligned with the economic wing of the Republican party—especially in education, which by its very nature is concerned with the transmission of culture and values to a new gener-

ation.

Chip Berlet, who has researched the right wing for over 20 years and is with the watch-dog group Political Research Associates, argues that progressives must begin to exploit the contradictions within the right. "It's a coalition and like all coalitions, there are points of unity and points of divergence," he said. "What has allowed them to operate, in part, is that their points of difference have not been scrutinized sufficiently."

Differences and Similarities

Economic and religious conservatives agree on a range of education issues. They both support vouchers and tax dollars for private and religious schools; they support privatization and charter schools; they have an antipathy toward federal education programs, in particular those designed to promote equity, and want to abolish the U.S. Department of Education.

Although they don't necessarily articulate anti-unionism as an explicit strategy, economic and religious conservatives both understand that breaking the power of the

teachers unions is essential to cementing Republican control over state and federal education politics. The unions not only are important allies of the Democratic Party but are one of the few forces which can match the financial and organizing resources of the right. Economic conservatives also know that unions want decent wages for the members, which drives up the cost of education. The religious conservatives, meanwhile, believe that the unions, in particular the NEA, have opened the school doors to secular humanism and practices such as cooperative learning, whole language, the teaching of evolution, and sexuality education that acknowledges the existence of homosexuals and sexually active teenagers.

Unity between the economic and religious conservatives is due partly to the fact that on many issues they agree. It is also based on opportunism. Both wings understand that maintaining their coalition is crucial if the Republican Party is to successfully dominate the country's political structures. As Kesler notes in *Keeping the Tablets*: "The paramount goal of con-

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Roots of the Right-wing Split

Conservatives have traditionally been divided into three main groups: traditional conservatives, neoconservatives, and libertarians. These groups form the core of what is referred to as the economic right.

Traditional conservatives were noted for their opposition to communism and to the New Deal. Their views have found expression most articulately in the *National Review*, founded by William Buckley in 1955.

The neoconservative movement sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s, founded by former "liberals" alarmed by what they considered the excesses of the anti-war, civil rights, and women's movements. These origins explain in part the cultural/social emphasis of many neoconservatives, who are predominantly concerned with social policy, not economic issues. The neoconservative movement has steadily moved rightward and many people argue

it is now indistinguishable from traditional conservatism. Some of the most prominent education reformers such as Chester Finn, Diane Ravitch, and William Bennett, tend to be associated with the neoconservative movement.

Libertarians tend to be more ideologically driven; they oppose government regulation of the marketplace and champion individual liberty and choice. The libertarians generally support vouchers and privatization based on ideological principle, while other conservatives often support such policies in the belief that private business and private schools will provide services more efficiently and will foster increased "competition." While libertarians are the religious right's most consistent allies in the fight for school vouchers, they are at odds with the religious right over social concerns such as gay rights and the right to abortion.

The religious right is a relatively new phenomenon in American politics and came to national prominence during the Reagan administration. During the Reagan era, the religious right was part of a phenomenon known as the New Right, to distinguish it from the traditional or "Old" Right. The New Right combined sophisticated marketing and direct mail techniques with a political message that stressed issues such as "pro-family values" and "busing." By appealing to blue-collar Democrats, the New Right was seen as a crucial ally in realigning American party politics and building the Republican base beyond the country club crowd.

Some of the most well-known religious conservatives from the Reagan presidency have faded, in particular Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority. But the groups today known as the religious right have their roots in that era.

servative politics over the past 40 years, though seldom articulated, has been to build a conservative Republican majority. This goal is paramount precisely because without it all the other things that conservatives have sought to accomplish — the specific domestic and foreign policies on which conservative politicians and research institutions lavish so much attention — cannot be accomplished over the long run."

Many religious conservatives, meanwhile, are willing to accommodate the less-than-ideal Robert Dole as a presidential candidate because they realize that the next president will potentially name as many as three Supreme Court justices. For the religious right, changing the makeup of the court is key to overturning rulings affecting not only abortion but separation of church and state.

There are important educational policy differences between economic and religious conservatives, however, with the religious right often emphasizing issues such as censorship, homophobia, homeschooling, opposition to standards, creationism, and the evils of secular humanism.

Deanna Duby, director of education policy for People for the American Way, notes that one critical difference between the two conservative wings is that the religious right stresses education based on rote obedience and memorization and prefers to provide children ready-made answers instead of encouraging them to think for themselves. This approach is at odds with those economic conservatives who agree that children must improve their problem-solving skills and who are not necessarily opposed to whole language, sexuality education, or drug prevention programs as long as academic "excellence" is not compromised.

"One of the beliefs

that underlies a lot of the religious right's work is that they really don't want any discussion at all about certain issues," Duby said. "They believe that if children are exposed to an idea, or even hear about it, they are vulnerable to being swept up into something different from their parents — that if you hear about sexuality, you are going to have sex, or that if you hear about homosexuality, you are going to become gay."

Progressive educators familiar with the religious right argue that their differences with the economic right sometimes appear to be based on rhetoric and emphasize — for example, how strongly they criticize self-esteem programs or push for school prayer. But those differences stem ultimately from a fundamental split over the role of religion in education. In particular, the leaders of the religious right are adamant in their desire to introduce their specific form of religion into the schools — either by taking over the public schools and remodeling them as religious schools or by pushing through vouchers for religious schools.

Economic conservatives "believe that the free market drives civilization, while the religious right believes that God drives civilization," notes Berlet of Political Action Research. "Just because God is driving the same way right now as corporate capitalism is a fortunate coincidence for



Credit: Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

Lamar Alexander.

the right."

Kaplan agrees that a theocratic vision is at the heart of the religious right's agenda. "The religious right movement is heading for a theocracy, and for them the schools must be based on religion," he said. "Fundamentally, it is the children who matter to the religious right, and they are obsessed with their children receiving religious instruction based on the literal interpretation of the Bible."

Lee Berg, a Baptist minister who has studied the religious right for over 20 years and who now works with the human

and civil rights division of the National Education Association (NEA), argues that too many people underestimate the extent to which the religious right is committed to a theocracy and a government based on literal interpretation of biblical principles. Berg points out that many of the top leaders in the religious right have been strongly influenced by Christian Reconstructionism. The movement, in essence, seeks to replace democracy with a theocratic form of government. It argues that secular law is always secondary to biblical law, and that it is the duty



Credit: Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed.

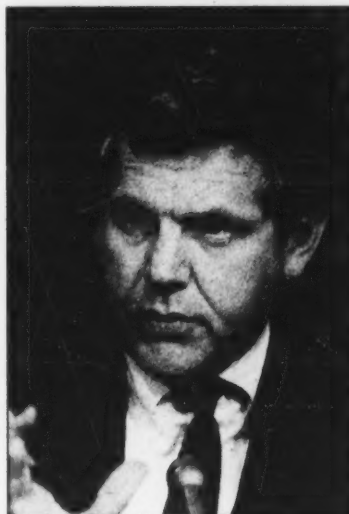
of Christians to see that God's law is paramount throughout society. While the movement has received minimal attention in the mainstream media, it is often considered the driving ideology of the religious right.

"While the reconstructionists represent only a small minority within Protestant theological circles, they have had tremendous influence on the theocratic right (a situation not unlike the influence of Students for a Democratic Society or the Black Panthers on the New Left in the 1960s)," writes Berlet in the new book he has edited, *Eyes Right!* "Reconstructionism is a factor behind the increased violence in the anti-abortion movement, the nastiest of attacks on gays and lesbians, and the new wave of battles over alleged secular humanist influence on the public schools."

The defining text of reconstructionism, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, is an 800-page tome written in 1973 by Rousas John Rushdoony. By providing a theological basis for Christian involvement in politics, it helped spur the growth of the religious right. The flavor of Rushdoony's approach can be captured in this excerpt: "The only true order is founded on biblical law. All law is religious in nature, and every non-biblical law-order represents an anti-Christian religion."

One reason that differences between the religious and economic right are sometimes unclear is that the religious right has become media savvy and has learned to couch its views in high-sounding rhetoric. When one reads literature distributed to its members, however, one often gets a different picture.

A typical tract is the book, *A Guide to the Public Schools for Christian Parents and Teachers and Especially for Pastors*, by Robert Simonds, president of Citizens for Excellence in Education/National Association of Christian Educators. The book notes that there are three ways to educate one's child: home-schooling ("the only truly biblical plan to educate our children"), Christian schooling ("the next best thing"), and public schooling. Simonds says he understands why parents might use the public school, "the most convenient school," but says this of public



Credit: Les Stone/Impact Visuals

William Bennett.

schools: "Morally, children are exposed to many unnecessary courses on human sexuality; occultic New Age indoctrination including necromancy (under hypnosis, talking to the dead); witchcraft; black magic; T.M.; eastern religions, etc. Social and psychological programs, diaries, visiting morgues, writing their own obituaries and grave-stone inscriptions, etc., as English assignments, have duly and rightfully upset parents."

No matter how much the William Bennetts of the world may choose to align with the religious right, it's hard to imagine that they believe such nonsense.

Standards and Goals 2000

Of the various education issues, the biggest split between economic and religious conservatives is over standards. The issue has surfaced most recently over Goals 2000 — and the power of the religious right is such that many Republicans have backtracked from publicly supporting Goals 2000, even though it has its roots in a bipar-

tisan reform initiated by the Bush administration.

While the economic conservatives (including the cultural conservatives contained within that wing) now emphasize that they support only voluntary national standards, the religious right is even opposed to voluntary measures. It has launched a virulent campaign against national standards, in particular Goals 2000, and argues that they are the first step on the slippery road to the government's total control of children.

Indicative of the conspiracy theories that permeate much of the religious/far-right literature, the Sept. 13 *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* in Montana carried a story about a woman who claimed she was a "sex slave" for Goals 2000. The woman said that William Bennett and Lamar Alexander prostituted her to different governors at a Goals 2000 convention, and she argued that Goals 2000 will turn children into objects of government mind control. When the woman told her story to a meeting of Citizens for a Free America, a militia group, she was given a round of applause, according to the article.

Major religious right organizations have also targeted Goals 2000. The *Weekly Standard*, the new conservative magazine edited by William Kristol, noted in a Feb. 5 article: "At a news conference last June,

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Credit: Bill Starnets/Impact Visuals

Phyllis Schlafly.

Thomas DeWeese of the Virginia-based American Policy Foundation captured the general tone of the attacks when he described the effect of programs like Goals 2000 on schools: "The indoctrination methods ... start in kindergarten, where students are filled with horror stories of ozone holes, dying species, homelessness, and war."

The article went on to note: "If some of the charges seemed overheated — conservative historian Diane Ravitch called them 'bizarre, almost paranoid' — they worked." Opposition to Goals 2000 has been so strong that even though the legislation was watered down to where it was almost meaningless, the religious right pressured a number of states and localities to refuse Goals 2000 money.

Yet standards are essential to the education agenda of the economic conserva-

tives think they are using the social base of the religious right for their agenda," notes Bastian. "And the religious right thinks they are using the policy access of the economic conservatives in order to gain influence in the halls of power. What's dangerous is that they both build on each other."

erforce its rigid views of morality.) The business community's commitment to standards was underscored recently by IBM chairman Louis Gerstner Jr. Along with Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, a Republican, Gerstner sponsored a private gathering of governors and business leaders at IBM headquarters in late March, focused in large part on reviving Goals 2000.



Credit: Carolina Koon/Impact Visuals

Rev. Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition.

Who Has Power?

The unanswered question, of course, is

ing. The Christian Coalition, for example, boasts that in many local communities it has raised more money, trained more candidates, and has a larger influence than the Republican Party. This grass-roots strength, in turn, has led to considerable national influence because the religious right has been able to mobilize its people for voting, demonstrations, hearings, phone calls, and letter-writing campaigns.

Duby of People for the American Way also notes that the religious right has targeted education as a top priority, and this is not true within the broader movement of economic conservatives.

"The national religious right organizations have put a very high priority on helping to set local policy for school boards," she said. "They are putting out an enormous amount of material, whether in radio programs or books, on how to become involved in education. And I don't think that is going to stop. They have very wisely identified public education as the place where our values as a nation are being formed, and they want their version of values in the schools."

Rev. Simonds, of Citizens for Excellence in Education/National Association of Christian Educators, claims that his organization helped elect more than 12,000 local school board members between 1989 and 1994. The Christian Coalition has also been active in training school board candidates and likewise



Credit: Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

The 1995 Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, DC.

tives and the broader business community. They are not categorically opposed to a federal role in education so long as it is focused on accountability and efficiency and not on programs such as bilingual education and Title I, which provides extra money for low-income schools and which has been funneled primarily into urban schools. (Nor is the religious right opposed to government intervention to

who is driving the conservative education agenda: economic or religious conservatives? The answer depends in part on where you live and whether you are active at the classroom, district, state or national policy level. It also depends on the power of the religious right in your community and in your state.

Equally important, one must ask: who is using whom? "The economic conserva-

boasts it has helped elect thousands of school board members.

It is not uncommon for hundreds of people to attend school board meetings around issues fomented in part by the religious right, such as Outcome-Based Education or creationism or the presence of "age-inappropriate" materials in school libraries — which in practice can mean books such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou or *Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Patterson. Even when the right has not been able to impose its agenda, it has stymied reforms it opposes, such as Goals 2000, cooperative learning and whole language, or health curricula that discuss birth control or sexual preference.

In many of the local controversies generated by the religious right, the economic conservatives sit on the sidelines. On the one hand, they do not like to antagonize the religious right. On the other, they understand that discontent over public education spawned by the religious right often serves their agenda of privatization. "You rarely find the economic conservative rejecting the arguments of the social conservatives and declaring their arguments to be false," the NEA's Berg said.

The economic conservatives, who are most attached to the ruling class, have wielded more influence at the federal and state level. The Contract With America, for example, is a decidedly economic doctrine focused on cutting taxes and eliminating the deficit by cutting social programs. (Interestingly, the Contract With America doesn't specifically address education policy.) More than 15 years after Ronald Reagan was elected President, in large part by the voting strength of the religious conservatives, abortion is still legal, school prayer is still illegal, and homosexuals are more accepted than ever in U.S. society.

At the state level, the religious right has



Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation.

Credit: Jennifer Warburg/Impact Visuals

been thwarted in part by the nature of bipartisan legislative politics. Republicans hold a legislative majority in many states by a slim majority. While the religious right may dominate the Republican party in a particular state, all it takes is for one or two Republicans to defect on a particular issue and it will not pass a state legislature. Because business interests influence not just the Republican but the

Democratic Party, they are much better than the religious right at forging bipartisan deals.

In some states, however, the religious right is an increasingly powerful force. In Tennessee, for instance, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum is spearheading legislation that would allow the firing of any teacher who presents evolution as fact. The Eagle Forum is also involved in the controversy in Salt Lake City, where the school board has banned all extracurricular clubs rather than allow a support group for gay and lesbian students.

On both a state and federal level, reli-

gious conservatives have let it be known that they are tired of economic issues taking priority, and they plan to demand increased legislative attention to their social issues. In fact, the religious right's decision to flex its political muscle is one of the reasons for the power of Buchanan's insurgency — just as it was a significant factor in the short life of the Colin Powell for President campaign.

Berg predicts there will come a time when the economic and religious conservatives have a falling out "but not until the economic conservatives wake up one day and realize their party has been taken over by the social conservatives. You have to remember that the religious right was brought into politics by the economic conservatives — by Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie and others who were upset with the drift of the Republican party and its East Coast liberalism and elitism. They created the beast, and now it's stronger than they are."

Even if the economic conservatives are able to dominate the Republican Party's convention, the religious conservatives will remain a powerful threat. "The social conservatives are not going to go away," Berg argues. "The Christian Coalition knows you take over a party one precinct at a time, and you take over America one school board at a time. All politics is local, and they haven't forgotten that." ■



Credit: Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

National Religious Broadcasters Conference in Nashville, in February 1995.

Economic Conservatives and Religious/Far-Right Organizations

The following four pages list major organizations affiliated with the economic and religious/far right wings of the Republican Party. The categories are in line with the organization's major orientation, and the groups often overlap on specific policies. The category "economic" encompasses libertarians, entrepreneurs, free-market ideologues, so-called "moderate" Republicans, and cultural conservatives. The religious/far right refers to those Christian-based groups active on education issues, such as the Christian Coalition and far-right allies such as the Free Congress Foundation. (The listing does not encompass paramilitary and overtly white-supremacist groups such as Christian Identity or the Patriot Movement.)

Economic Conservatives

Economic Think Tanks/Policy Groups

The following are some of the leading national think tanks and public policy groups based primarily on a free-market, economic orientation. Although they do not receive the same publicity as the religious right, these organizations unquestionably rival its power. Educationally, they focus on vouchers, charters, deregulation, privatization, and oppose federal programs designed to further equity, such as bilingual education, special education, and Title I. While some stress cultural issues, they tend to shy away from concerns such as prayer in the schools. (Think tanks focused on military and foreign policy issues are not included in this listing.)

American Enterprise Institute

Founded in 1943 to promote free-enterprise economics, AEI is often considered the most powerful conservative think tank after the Heritage Foundation. Based in Washington, D.C.

Cato Institute

Libertarian oriented, Cato was founded in the 1970s by Ed Crane, a former head of the Libertarian Party. A strong supporter of vouchers and privatization, it also supports gay rights, decriminalization of drugs, and relaxed immigration controls. Based in Washington, D.C.

Center for Education Reform

A relatively new organization, the center is headed by Jeanne Allen, a former policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation. Its

emphasis includes vouchers and privatization. The center also helped form the Education Leaders Council, a grouping of conservative school board chiefs and state school board members. Based in Washington, D.C.

Center for the Study of Popular Culture

Founded in 1988 by former leftists David Horowitz and Peter Collier, the center is the pit-bull of right-wing think tanks. It focuses on cultural issues and led the attack on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. Its monthly tabloid, *Heterodoxy*, focuses on university issues, while its year-old *The Report Card* zeroes in on K-12 education. Based in Los Angeles.

The Educational Excellence Network

A project of the Hudson Institute, the network was founded in 1982 by Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane S. Ravitch. The network emphasizes privatization, vouchers, charters, standards, and a core curriculum centered on Western Civilization. Members of its national advisory council include E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Albert Shanker, and Denis P. Doyle. Based in Indianapolis.

Empower America

Founded in 1993 by William Bennett and Jack Kemp, Empower America bridges economic issues such as a flat tax proposal with cultural issues popular with social conservatives; it also strongly supports school vouchers. Other co-directors include Lamar Alexander, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Vin Weber. Malcolm Forbes, Jr. is chairman. Based in Washington, D.C.

Heritage Foundation

Founded in 1973, Heritage is the most powerful conservative think tank in the country and is sometimes considered a shadow government. It concentrates on economic issues but acts as an important bridge to social conservatives through a secondary focus on cultural issues. Heritage has an annual budget of approximately \$245 million and a staff of 160. Educationally, its emphasis is on privatization, vouchers, eliminating federal programs and the U.S. Department of Education, and lower taxes. Based in Washington, D.C.

Hoover Institution

Hoover is the oldest and most influential of conservative think tanks based on college or university campuses. Hoover's focus is on promoting "free markets and free societies," and it has vigorously pushed privatization and vouchers. Its research fellows include economists Thomas Sowell and Milton Friedman, and Terry Moe, co-author of the pro-voucher book, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are honorary fellows. Based at Stanford University.

The Hudson Institute

Founded in 1961, for many years Hudson focused on national security and international affairs. It now also has a strong emphasis on domestic issues, including education (Hudson sponsors the Educational Excellence Network). Its trustees include Dan Quayle and Alexander Haig, Jr., and its education research staff includes Chester E. Finn, Jr., and William J. Bennett. Based in Indianapolis.

Manhattan Institute

Manhattan has been associated with the conservative movement since its founding in 1978 but is less ideologically rigid than many conservative think tanks. It sponsors the Center for Educational Innovation and works on restructuring public schools within a free-market framework. Based in New York City.

Pacific Research Institute

Founded in 1979, the institute emphasizes

es free markets, privatization, and vouchers. It has a Center for Innovation in Education, which in 1996 will focus on legal and regulatory issues that limit charter schools. It is also setting up the Charter School Legal Defense Network. Based in San Francisco.

Reason Foundation

A libertarian-oriented think tank founded in 1978, Reason is the leading national advocate of the privatization of government services. Based in Los Angeles

State-based Think Tanks

In the last 15 years, conservative foundations and businesses have helped fund more than 30 state-based think tanks. They range from the Alabama Family Alliance to the California Public Policy Foundation, the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, the Heartland Institute in Illinois, the Constitutional Heritage Institute in Nebraska, the Cascade Policy Institute in Oregon, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Legal Groups

There are four main legal groups involved in litigation supported by economic conservatives. (There are also a number of regional legal organizations, such as the Atlantic Legal Foundation in New York and the Pacific Legal Foundation in Sacramento, Calif.) The national groups are:

Center for Individual Rights

Founded in 1989, this Washington-based group specializes in academic cases and issues of "political correctness."

Washington Legal Foundation

One of several conservative public interest firms formed in the 1970s, it has been particularly active in attacking affirmative action.

Institute for Justice

Especially active on school vouchers, this Washington-based group is helping to defend the Wisconsin legislation that seeks to provide tax dollars for religious schools (the case is currently before the Wisconsin Supreme Court). Its litigation director, Clint Bolick, is best known outside education circles for spearheading the attack on Clinton nominee Lani Guinier.

Landmark Legal Foundation

Based in Kansas City, Mo., Landmark is a national firm founded in 1976 to advance a free market economy. It also is defending

the Wisconsin voucher legislation.

Conservative Foundations

While conservative foundations are not as large as more liberal groups such as the Ford Foundation or Pew Charitable Trust, they are more ideologically focused. In 1992-93, for example, conservative foundations granted about \$10 million to the two leading conservative think tanks, the Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute. Some of the key conservative foundations are:

The Bradley Foundation

Through its president, Michael Joyce, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation is often considered the ideological leader of the conservative foundations. In 1994 it had assets of \$389 million, and approved roughly \$23 million in grants.

The Carthage Foundation, Allegheny Foundation and Sarah Scaife Foundation

Controlled by conservative philanthropist Richard Mellon Scaife, of the oil and bank clan, these three conservative foundations give away upward of \$20 million annually, or about \$400,000 a week, with most to New Right causes.

John M. Olin Foundation

Founded in 1953 by John M. Olin of the Olin Corporation, a chemical and industrial company. The foundation, based in New York City, had assets of \$122 million in 1995, and made grants of \$16.1 million.

Smith Richardson Foundation

With assets of \$366 million in 1993, it made grants of \$8.5 million.

JM Foundation

Based in New York, it made grants totaling \$2.1 million in 1993.

For-Profit Education Businesses

There has been a proliferation of for-profit education companies in recent years. While they support voucher and charter school initiatives that they believe will gain them entry into the education market, they are often at odds with the curriculum focus of the religious right.

Education Alternatives, Inc.

For many years the leader in for-profit firms hoping to run public schools, EAI has had its contracts in Dade County, Fla., Bal-

timore, and Hartford canceled in the last year. Stock in the Minneapolis-based company plummeted from an all-time high of \$48 to \$4.25 in the spring of 1996.

The Edison Project

Started by entrepreneur/charmer Chris Whittle, Edison survived the collapse of the once mighty communications empire, Whittle Communications. The New York-based Edison Project is a privately held company and financial information is not available. It is led by former Yale University head Benno Schmidt and has spent more than \$40 million in research and development. It currently is running four public schools.

Alternative Public Schools, Inc.

Based in Nashville, Alternative won a contract to run an elementary school in Wilkesburg, Pa., and one of its first moves was to replace the school's unionized staff and bring in staff from around the country.

Sylvan Learning Centers

Based in Columbia, Md., Sylvan provides computer-based remedial lessons in reading and math to a growing number of school districts. Many consider its approach more financially viable than the "all-or-nothing" management strategy of Edison and EAI.

Education Investor

This unabashedly pro-business monthly follows private investment in the education industry. Editor John McLoughlin is often quoted in the mainstream press as an objective analyst. If nothing else, McLoughlin appears an astute businessman. Subscriptions for the 10-page monthly newsletter are \$299 a year.

"At-risk" Youth

Private companies providing services for "at-risk" youth include **Ombudsman Educational Services, Ltd.**, based in Libertyville, Ill., and **Youth Services International, Inc.**, based in Owings Mills, Md.

Non-educational, contracted services:

A number of private companies provide food services, facilities management, or transportation. An estimated 5-10% of K-12 public schools contract out food services to companies such as **Marriott International, Inc.**, **PepsiCo, Inc.**, and **Pizza Hut Worldwide**. Facilities managers include **Johnson Controls Inc.**, and the **ServiceMaster Co.** Transportation firms include **Laidlaw, Inc.**, **Ryder System, Inc.**, and **Mayflower Contract Services.**

continued on page 80

Religious/Far Right Groups

continued from page 79

The following national organizations are associated with the religious/far right. They generally support school prayer, creationism and Christian home-schooling, and are adamantly opposed to secular humanism and practices such as AIDS/HIV education, school-based health clinics, whole language, Outcome-based education, multiculturalism, standards, and Goals 2000. Some, such as the Free Congress Foundation, are not necessarily religiously based but embrace much of the religious right agenda. While the religious right receives some corporate and foundation funding, it is estimated that about 90% of the religious right's funds comes from individual contributions. (Special thanks to People for the American Way and the Institute for First Amendment Studies for their information.)

Top National Organizations

American Family Association

Founded in 1977 as the National Federation for Decency by Rev. Donald E. Wildmon. A Christian-based organization, its empire includes publications, radio programs, and state chapters. In 1993 its annual income was about \$6 million. It claims to have 1.7 to 1.8 million members, although a recent *Newsweek* article put the figure at 400,000 in 1995. It publishes the monthly *AFA Journal*, with a circulation of nearly 500,000, and its 30-minute radio show is broadcast on about 1,200 local radio stations. With a budget of over \$10 million, it has about 40 employees. Wildmon was a national co-chair of the Buchanan for Presidency campaign. Based in Tupelo, Miss.

Council for National Policy

Founded in 1981, the council is a highly secretive umbrella organization of more than 500 far-right leaders. Its membership roster is a virtual who's who of the far right and includes national legislative leaders such as Reps. Tom DeLay (R-TX), Steve Stockman (R-TX), and Bob Dornan (R-CA); Sens. Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Lauch Faircloth (R-NC); and organizational leaders such as Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson, Paul Weyrich, and Gary Bauer. Membership is \$1,500 a year, plus \$300 for its newsletter. Its current president is Ed Meese, former attorney general in the Reagan administration.

Chalcedon

Founded in 1964, it is often considered the leading think-tank of the religious right. Its president, Rousas John Rushdoony, is seen as the father of Christian Reconstructionism, an influential doctrine which mandates a return to Biblical law and the cre-

ation of Christ's Kingdom on earth. Rushdoony supports the concept of a theocracy and has advocated the death penalty for "practicing homosexuals, and abortionists." He has criticized democracy and pluralism because "the believer is asked to associate on a common level of total acceptance with the atheist, the pervert, the criminal, and the adherents of other religions." Based in Vallecito, Calif.

Christian Coalition

Founded in 1989 out of the ashes of the Moral Majority, it is the most powerful of the religious right organizations — well-funded, well-organized, strong at the grass-roots level, and sophisticated in the use of computer technology and media. It has two main goals: to take working control of the Republican Party by working from the grassroots up and to elect "Christian candidates" to public office. The president is Pat Robertson, but the man most credited with its growth is Ralph Reed Jr., a young, savvy political operator who is willing to compromise tactically for the sake of strategic power. One of Reed's most famous quotes, regarding the coalition's "stealth" approach to electing candidates: "I want to be invisible. I do guerrilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until you're in a body bag." It has 1.7 million members, and Reed boasts that in many cases the state affiliate of the Christian Coalition raises and spends more money than the state Republican Party. It reportedly had a \$20 million budget for 1994. The Christian Coalition recently formed a subsidiary, the Catholic Alliance. Based in Chesapeake, Va.

Citizens for Excellence in Education/ National Association of Christian Educators

Founded in 1983, the CEE/NACE is one of the most active religious right groups on education. Rev. Robert Simons claims that between 1989 and 1994, his group helped elect 12,000 conservative Christians to school boards nationwide. It reportedly has a membership of 250,000 and a \$610,000 budget. Based in Costa Mesa, Calif.

Concerned Women For America

Founded in 1979 and led by Beverly LaHaye, Concerned Women is one of the most virulently anti-gay, anti-sex education groups in the country. It also opposes anti-drug and alcohol abuse programs that emphasize self-esteem. It reportedly has 1,200 chapters across the country, and its 30-minute daily radio show reaches an estimated 750,000 people. Based in Washington, D.C.

Eagle Forum

Founded in 1972, the forum is led by Phyllis Schlafly, who is most well known for her successful fight against the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s. A national leader in the fight against OBE, Goals 2000, and sex education, the Eagle Forum has recently focused on homophobic issues. Based in Alton, Ill. The forum also has an Education Center based in St. Louis.

Family Research Council

Founded in 1981, the council merged with Focus on the Family from 1988-1992 then became independent again. Its president is Gary Bauer, who has emerged as a key religious right leader and Republican operative. Bauer is the former chairman of the Citizens Committee to Confirm Clarence Thomas and during the Reagan administration was a policy analyst and an undersecretary in the Department of Education. The council has an estimated 250,000 members and a budget of \$8 million. Based in Washington, D.C.

Focus on the Family

Founded in 1977, it is led by James Dobson. A virtual media empire, it publishes the monthlies *Focus on the Family*, *Citizen*, *Parental Guidance*, and *Clubhouse and Club-*

house Jr., magazines. Its radio broadcasts reach an estimated 3-5 million people in the U.S. and 3,000 stations in other countries. It has a \$90 million annual budget and a staff of about 1,300. It claims a membership of 2.1 million members and a total of 4 million supporters. Based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Free Congress Foundation

Founded in 1977, the foundation is headed by Paul Weyrich, one of the most influential leaders of the far right. Weyrich is the founding president of the Heritage Foundation and the man who suggested the term "moral majority" to Jerry Falwell and who suggested that Pat Robertson enter politics. Free Congress is aggressively active at the grass-roots level on a broad range of social issues, not just education. It recently launched its National Empowerment Television, a cable network designed to mobilize religious right followers. NET reaches about 11 million viewers and has an annual budget of \$6 million. The foundation, meanwhile, has a budget of approximately \$6 million. Based in Washington, D.C.

Home School Legal Defense Association

The association is headed by Michael Farris, formerly with Moral Majority and former education advisor for Pat Buchanan. The association provides legal information and, if necessary, representation for home-schooling issues. Based in Paeonian Springs, Va.

Traditional Values Coalition

One of the more stridently homophobic of the religious right organizations, the coalition was founded in 1981 and is led by the Rev. Louis Sheldon. The group claims connections to 31,000 churches and has active chapters in 20 states. Its 1993 budget was nearly \$500,000. Based in Anaheim, Calif.

Legal Groups

While many religious groups maintain their own legal arms, there are three key legal groups affiliated with the religious right.

Alliance Defense Fund

Founded by leaders of the religious right such as James Dobson of Focus on the

Family and Don Wildmon of the American Family Association, the fund is dedicated to "reclaiming legal ground for the body of Christ." The ADF does not litigate but finances the training and preparation of attorneys. Based in Phoenix, Ariz.

Rutherford Institute

Founded in 1982 by John Whitehead, it is a Christian-based legal group that has been linked to the extremist views of Christian Reconstructionism, which seeks to establish a theocracy. It also publishes a monthly magazine. In 1994 it had an annual budget of about \$11 million and nine staff attorneys. Based in Charlottesville, Va.

American Center for Law & Justice

The center is affiliated with Pat Robertson and concentrates on religious liberty cases. Along with Rutherford, it is the pre-eminent religious right legal arm. Based in Virginia Beach, Va.

Conservative Publications

Just about every organization has its own publication, and many of the religious right groups have their own radio and television outlets. The following are popularly oriented publications that tend to be linked to the economic right, although some appeal to both sectors.

The American Spectator

More aggressive in its reporting and less intellectual than some conservative publications, this monthly magazine was one of the first to attack Anita Hill unmercifully; it also loves to mount anti-Hillary campaigns.

National Review

Founded in 1955 by William F. Buckley, Jr., *The National Review* is the grand-daddy of intellectual conservative magazines and currently has a circulation of 250,000. (*The National Review*, *Public Interest* and *Commentary* are considered the three leading conservative intellectual journals.)

The New Republic

Generally associated with the neoconservative movement, *The New Republic* is more ideologically flexible than publications such as *The National Review* or *The American Spectator*. While unrelenting in its attacks on multiculturalism, Afrocentrism and "political correctness," it unequivocally attacks old-right racists and gay bashers such as Pat Buchanan.

Human Events

Billed as *The National Conservative Weekly*, this Maryland-based publication is a conservative tabloid newspaper that was founded in 1944. It is read by conservatives as varied as Jack Kemp and Pat Buchanan.

Wall Street Journal editorial page

Although the news pages of the Journal are less conservative than one might expect, the editorial/opinion page is the most influential conservative forum in the country.

Washington Times

Founded in 1982 by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, this daily is now an essential part of the conservative media machine. It fancies itself an alternative to the *Washington Post*, to the extent of publishing a national weekly tabloid.

The Weekly Standard

Founded in 1995 by William Kristol, son of Irving, *The Weekly Standard* quickly established itself as a must-read. The monthly is a slick magazine designed to wield power, rather than an intellectual journal content with the world of ideas. ■

Progressive Groups Monitoring the Right Wing

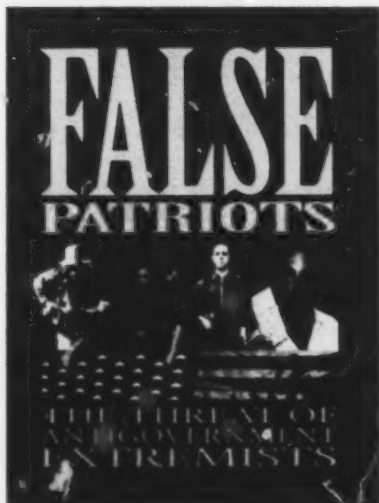
There are a number of liberal and progressive organizations monitoring the right, in particular the religious/far right. They include:

Americans for Religious Liberty. This group has an extensive publications list on the religious right and on issues such as vouchers. **Contact:** Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20916. 301-598-2447.

Americans United For Separation of Church and State. Americans United focuses on First Amendment Issues, in particular on the voucher movement. **Contact:** 1816 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-466-3234.

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. Established in 1913, the league combats not only anti-Semitism but bigotry and racism. It was one of the first organizations to warn of the growing power of armed, right-wing militias. **Contact:** 823 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017. 212-490-2525.

Center for Democratic Renewal. Based in Atlanta, the center has a particular focus on racist, far-right groups such as militias and white supremacist organizations. Extensive publications. **Contact:** PO Box 50469, Atlanta, GA 30302. 404-221-0025. E-mail: cdr@igc.apc.org.



Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. This media watchdog publishes a bimonthly newsletter and focuses on right-wing media influence. It has a wide range of resources and publications. **Contact:** 130 W. 25th St., New York, NY 10001. 212-633-6700; fax 212-727-7668. Internet: <http://www.fairfair.org>.

Institute for First Amendment Studies. Founded in 1984, the institute publishes the monthly *Freedom Writer Magazine*, which not only reports on the far right but offers advice on counter-organizing. Its vice-president, Skip Porteus, reportedly has moles in a number of far right organizations. **Contact:** PO Box 589, Great Barrington, MA 02130. 413-528-3800. Internet: <http://www.berkshire.net/~ifas>.

National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL). Publishers of *Sexuality Education in America: A State-By-State Review*, 1995. The study is the first comprehensive national survey of sex education laws. \$15 suggested donation. **Contact:** NARAL Legal Department, 202-973-3017, or write to NARAL, 1156 15th St., NW, Washington, DC 20005.

National Center for Science Education. Founded in 1983, NCSE has a quarterly newsletter, a biannual journal, and various pamphlets to improve and support the teaching of evolution in public schools. It is affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Science Teachers Association. **Contact:** PO Box 9477, Berkeley, CA 94709. 510-526-1674.

National Coalition Against Censorship. The coalition publishes a newsletter and organizes against censorship. Members range from the ACLU to the National Council for Social Studies, the Newspaper Guild, Union of American Jewish Congregations, and the American Library Association. **Contact:** 275 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10001. 212-807-6222.

National Education Association, Human and Civil Rights Division. The division's Freedom to Teach and Learn Project monitors the religious right's attacks on public

education. Provides resources and strategies for responding to the religious right. **Contact:** NEA-HCR, 1201 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-822-7700.

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. The NGLTF organizes at the regional and national levels and publishes the *Fight the Right Action Kit*. **Contact:** 2320 17th St., NW, Washington, DC 20009. 202-332-6483.

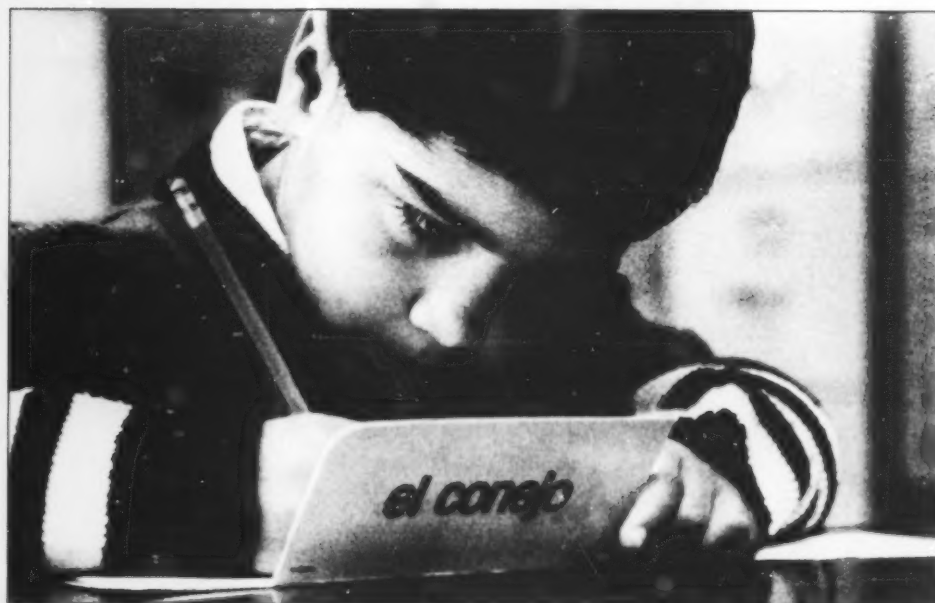
People for the American Way. Probably the best single source of information on the religious right, People for the American Way publishes a variety of publications and reports. **Contact:** 2000 M. St., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. 202-467-4999. E-mail: pfaw@pfaw.org. Internet: <http://www.pfaw.org/>

Political Research Associates. Founded in 1981, this group provides research and analysis on the far right, electronically and in printed form. It maintains a free Bulletin Board System that can be accessed by dialing 617-221-5815 with a modem. **Contact:** 120 Beacon St., 3rd Floor, Somerville, MA 02143. 617-661-9313. E-mail: publiceye@publiceye.org. Internet: <http://www.publiceye.org/pr/>

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U. S. (SIECUS). Publishes a "Community Action Kit" that provides information on effective and accurate sexuality education and that helps counter the radical right's campaign against sexuality education. (\$19.95, including s&h.) **Contact:** SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350, New York, NY 10036. 212-819-9770.

Southern Poverty Law Center, Klanwatch/Militia Task Force. Klanwatch and the Militia Task Force monitor white supremacist groups and the antigovernment Patriot Movement. The Southern Poverty Law Center also sponsors the education magazine *Teaching Tolerance*. The center's latest publication, *False Patriots: The Threat of Antigovernment Extremists* is an invaluable guide to the Patriot movement. **Contact:** 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104. 334-264-0286. ■

Resources on Vouchers



Credit: Evan Johnson/Impact Visuals

Books

There are an increasing number of books dealing with vouchers, markets, and the separation of church and state. Key books include:

Chubb, John and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990). The most influential work developing a theoretical argument in support of vouchers.

Cookson, Peter Jr., *School Choice: The Struggle for the Soul of American Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Analyzes school choice plans based on student achievement, school improvement, and the democratic mission of schools.

Frankel, Marvin, *Faith and Freedom: Religious Liberty in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994). A popularly written and lucid analysis arguing that the separation of church and state is a fundamental requirement for religious liberty.

Fuller, Bruce, Richard Elmore, and Gary Orfield, *Who Chooses? Who Loses?* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1996). A critique of the claim that voucher and choice plans lead to equitable student outcomes.

Henig, Jeffrey, *Rethinking School Choice: The Limits of the Market Metaphor* (Princeton University Press, 1994). A wide-ranging critique of vouchers that is especially useful for its analysis of market ideology based on democratic theory.

Smith, Kevin B., and Kenneth J. Meier, *The Case Against School Choice: Politics, Markets, and Fools* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). A critical overview with a good section on comparisons between U.S. schools and those in other industrialized countries.

The following three books are useful collections of essays providing various views on the "choice" issue.

Clune, William and John Witte, eds., *Choice and Control in American Education* (Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, 1990).

James, Thomas and Henry Levin, eds., *Public Dollars for Private Schools: The Case of Tuition Tax Credits* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

Rasell, Edith and Richard Rothstein, eds., *School Choice: Examining the Evidence* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 1993).

Organizations

The following organizations are involved in fighting publicly funded vouchers for private schools, in particular plans that include religious schools.

American Civil Liberties Union, 132 W. 43rd St., New York, NY 10036. 212-944-9800.

Americans for Religious Liberty, Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20916. 301-598-2447.

Americans United For Separation of Church and State, 1816 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-466-3234.

National Coalition of Education Activists, PO Box 679, Rhinebeck, NY 12572. 914-876-4580.

National Education Association, Center for the Preservation of Public Education, 1201 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 202-822-7700.

People for the American Way, 2000 M St., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. 202-467-4999.

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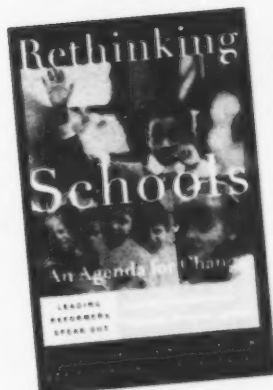
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